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THE MORAL SYSTEM OF SHAKESPEARE

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The Moral System of Shakespeare

A POPULAR ILLUSTRATION OF

FICTION AS THE EXPERIMENTAL SIDE OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

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PREFACE

The purpose and scope of this work are fully set forth in the introductory section. A preface is desirable only for explanations upon two points of detail.

My former book, *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist*, originally published (by the Clarendon Press, Oxford) in 1885, is now (third edition, 1893) in extensive use amongst private readers and in schools and universities. This present work illustrates an entirely different view point of literary study. Necessarily, however, two books treating the same author must have some points in common. Where this is the case, I have usually in the present work given the briefest treatment consistent with clearness, the reader being referred by footnotes to the other book for fuller discussion.

In what is intended primarily for the general reader I have wished to exclude technical discussion from the text. Believing, however, that precise analysis of structure is the best foundation for the fullest appreciation of literary beauty, I have added an Appendix, which gives formal schemes of plot for each of the Shakespearean plays. In these analyses I have broken away altogether from the current schemes of plot analysis. These, however able in detail, appear to me to be in method no more than adaptations of Aristotle's principles to new matter; they are thus survivals of the Renaissance criticism, in which all that might be newly created must be surveyed from the one standpoint of Greek art. But Greek Drama and Shakespearean Drama — of equal importance in universal literature — stand nevertheless at opposite poles of dramatic structure; the one

rests upon the severe simplicity of the unities, the other reaches after free play and fulness, rejoicing to draw the most complex material into artistic harmony. Accordingly, I have adopted a method of dramatic analysis which allows dramatic movement to fall into the second place, while the chief prominence is given to the multiplication of stories which is the essence of the Romantic Drama, and to the exquisite effects of balance and symmetry which make its artistic glory. We moderns pay the best tribute to the Founder of Criticism when we imitate, not his results, but his spirit, and interrogate the new literary material, as Aristotle interrogated his Greek Drama, for the principles which best explain the literary product.

By this combination of general discussion in the text with formal analysis in the Appendix I have tried to make what may serve as a text-book of Shakespeare for students of literary clubs or scholastic institutions. And I would say to the reader who is conscious to himself of being no more than a pleasure seeker in his reading, that he will consult best for his own pleasure if he will give attention to the foundation interest of dramatic structure, as enhancing beauties of effect which lie more upon the surface.

RICHARD G. MOULTON.

April, 1903.

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THE MORAL SYSTEM OF SHAKESPEARE

THE MORAL SYSTEM OF SHAKESPEARE

INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS IMPLIED IN "THE MORAL SYSTEM OF SHAKESPEARE"

The title of this work, The Moral System of Shakespeare, is not intended to suggest that the man Shakespeare had formed in his mind a certain system of morals, which he proceeded to put into his plays. Indeed, this book does not concern itself in any way with the man Shakespeare; if any of my readers inclines to the view that the plays of Shakespeare were written by Lord Bacon, or, for that matter, by Queen Elizabeth, he will find nothing in the pages that follow to disturb his faith. 'Shakespeare' is only used as a convenient name for the whole body of thirty-six dramas usually attributed to William Shakespeare, by whomsoever these dramas may have been composed, in whatsoever way they may have been put together. The contents of these thirty-six plays make a world of their own, a world of personages, of incidents, of story. It is surely possible to survey this imaginary world from the same standpoint from which the moralist surveys the world of reality: the result of such a survey, put together with some degree of methodical order, will give us the moral system of the Shakespearean Drama.

At the outset of our task a word of disclaimer must be said against what may be called the Fallacy of Quotations. Nothing is commoner than the attempt to convey the mind of Shakespeare by passages from his plays. Yet this is obviously delusive. If we

were to select a large number of moral topics, if we were to arrange these in alphabetical order from Atonement to Zeal, if under each heading we were diligently to collect extracts from the thirty-six dramas, pointed sayings and passionate outpourings, we should at the end of our labour be no nearer than we were at the beginning to the moral system of Shakespeare. For dramatic differs from other literature in this, that quotations from a play can never reveal either the mind of the author or the spirit of the drama. "Man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward, as the Bible says." But the Bible does not say so. The words are found in the dramatic *Book of Job* as part of what is spoken by Eliphaz the Temanite; and the same *Book of Job* represents God as declaring that Eliphaz has not said the thing that is right. Is the Bible to be held responsible for the sentiment of one whom it represents God as repudiating? In one of Shakespeare's plays is found this sentiment:

> Conscience is but a word that cowards use,
> Devised at first to keep the strong in awe.

In another play appears this other saying—

> Thus conscience does make cowards of us all!

For which of these contradictory sentiments is Shakespeare to be held responsible? He is responsible for neither. The first extract represents nothing but the opinion of such a man as the imaginary Richard; the second gives us only the opinion of the imaginary Hamlet. For every word in a play some imaginary speaker, and only he, is responsible; and thus in dramatic literature no amount of quotations can give us the mind of the poet or the meaning of the poem.

In what way then are we to seek the moral significance of the Shakespearean Drama? In the first place, the principle must be consistently followed that all the speeches of a play must be read with regard to the character of the speaker, and to the circumstances in which he speaks. But to this principle another may be

added. The treatment of the subject in the present work assumes as its basis the study of plot. Plot is the reduction of all the details of a poem to a unity of design. It is in fiction what providence is in the world of reality. As we contemplate the vast universe we delight to believe that —

All are but parts of one stupendous whole:

the religious mind instinctively feels this; science is occupied in taking the phenomenal universe to pieces and tracing the parts of which it is made up. So in the mimic world of a drama or story, all are but parts of one artistic whole: the cultured mind has an instinctive sense of such plot; criticism takes the drama or story to pieces and analyses the parts which have been moulded into a unity. Every single play of Shakespeare will be a microcosm, of which the author is the creator, and the plot is its providential scheme. When analysis of the various plays has put together results drawn from each, then we have a body of material sufficient for the study of underlying principles, and — so far as may be — for the coördination of principles into something of a moral system.

But is such work worth doing? it will be asked. Plays are a form of human amusement; in the case of Shakespeare, no doubt, the enjoyment will be of an elevating character, still it will be in the category of amusement. If we go beyond this, are we not in danger of spoiling good sport in order to make doubtful philosophy?

The answer to this question will depend upon the meaning the particular reader attaches to the word poetry. The tyranny of words is great: the fact that the word prose has a double usage, contrasting sometimes with poetry and sometimes with verse, has brought it about that in many minds poetry has come to mean verse, or, at least, poetry is conceived as only a mode of expression. But poetry is also a mode of thought: its root significance is creation. The philosopher and the poet are alike thinkers, but they express their thinking in different forms; the philosopher

thinks in abstract principles and arguments, the poet expresses his thoughts in the concrete, in the illustrative examples he creates. The two types meet in physical science. Now, the physicist is a philosopher, conveying what he has observed of nature in laws and inductions. At another time, in what he calls experiments, the physicist creates: he contrives, at his arbitrary will, peculiar combinations, which would not be brought into existence but for him, and obedient nature exhibits what her working would do under these conditions. In a similar way poetry and fiction are an experimental side to the philosophy of human life. History, biography, psychology, ethics, correspond to the physicist's mere observation of nature; these studies limit the material they use to what happens to have happened. Poetry and fiction use the same material of human life without limiting it to what has chanced actually to occur; all that would naturally happen in the conditions contrived makes the material of creative literature, which can thus give to its treatment of human life all the range of crucial experiment.

I say boldly, that the study of human life will never hold its own, in comparison with the study of physical nature, until we recognise the true position of poetry and fiction in philosophy. Our present confinement of moral studies to histories and abstract ethics holds the humanities back in the elementary stage of observation without experiment. More than this, the survey of life that bounds itself by facts is not even the best kind of observation: it is like the timid examination of nature by one who will use nothing but the naked eye. The life that is close around observers is an eddying whirl of unrelated particulars; what more is wanted to make particulars into the general ideas we call truth is either too far off to be seen, or so near as to be out of perspective. The same difficulty in the observation of nature we meet by the use of the telescope and the microscope; it is true that when we look through these we do not see things but the images of things, yet it is only by aid of such images that we can get nature at the proper distance for observation. The poetic mind is the lens provided by nature for human life; 'works of imagination' are so

called because they give us the 'images' of human things, cleared from the vagueness of too great distance, or the obscurity caused by irrelevant details. The Shakespearean Drama constitutes a vast body of such creative observations in human life, made through a peerless instrument; they invite arrangement and disposition into general truths.

Objections felt in some quarters against the sort of study here attempted will often be found to resolve themselves into misconception of poetry and its creative function. Men of affairs often make themselves merry at the expense of the scholarship that brings elaborate discussion to bear upon what after all is purely imaginative material. "If Shakespeare be not" — I quote in substance a newspaper article — "the most muddled, unintelligible and inchoate genius that ever handled a pen, why should he need by way of explanation commentaries in volume far exceeding the whole volume of the plays?" The writer of these words has not seen that only an infinitesimally small portion of Shakespeare commentaries — and that, in my judgment, the portion which could best be spared — is commentary on Shakespeare. The vast proportion is comment upon human life itself, touched as life is at myriad points by the creations of the Shakespearean Drama. Discussion of human life is likely to go on gathering both volume and value to the end of time.

Other objectors readily admit the general principle; but, they ask, is Shakespeare up to date in his psychology and ethics? Similarly, I imagine, many a tailor, visiting a public gallery of paintings, is convinced in his heart that Vandyck was not up to date in his fashions. For there is even in grave studies an element of fashion; particular problems have prominence at particular times, and the technical terms associated with them recur with insistent emphasis; the fascination of being up to date somewhat disturbs perspective, and the psychology that does not run into current moulds seems to be no psychology at all. But the important point is that Shakespeare is not a psychologist, elementary or advanced, in the sense in which the word is used by the

objector; Shakespeare's work is to project upon the screen of our imagination pieces of human life, which it is for general psychology and ethics to analyse. And if any student has a system of psychology and ethics which will not bear confronting with the life revealed by Shakespeare, it might be well for him to doubt whether his system may not be one-sided, rather than that the insight of Shakespeare should be antiquated.

A more reasonable doubt is, how far such study of the dramas can be reduced to a system. Indeed, I cannot help thinking that the drawback to most of the existing commentaries on Shakespeare is that they lean towards over-systematisation; with full intention of inductive examination, investigators have nevertheless approached their work with an unconscious bias towards neat generalisations and rounded coördinations.[1] For myself, I am content to draw nothing more of system out of the world of Shakespeare's creations than may be drawn from the world of real life. None of us believe the world about us to be a mere chaos. The sifted life that is held up for our observation by Shakespeare will similarly show underlying principles; every degree of success in discovering and coördinating moral ideas in the Drama may lay claim to the broad sense of the word system.

It remains to ask, how far we are to extend the range of the word moral in treating the moral system of Shakespeare. In the first place, we are open to consider all that touches character, the ways of men, the aims, motives, impulses, whether of individuals or classes: all that is covered by the Latin word *mores*. So far as this goes we are on the same ground as the science of ethics. But, though it would seem as if the Latin word *morals* and the Greek word *ethics* were exact counterparts one of the other, yet in usage and common thought the conception of morals extends much beyond the science of ethics.

[1] Professor Dowden's *Mind and Art of Shakspere* is an exception. I entirely concur in the spirit of his remark (page 429): "Let us not attenuate Shakspere to a theory": though my title may seem a contradiction. The question is simply how far the word *system* is to be pressed.

We think of a moral system as including, not only the aspect which the individual shows to the universe, but also the aspect which the course of events in the universe shows to the individual. Varieties of character, and variations of fortune or fate, are elements which must combine to give the idea of a moral order in the world. It is here that the great questions of a moral system arise. An influential school of commentators on drama, corresponding to a school that has always existed among thinkers on real life, stand for the rigid connection of men's moral natures with their fortunes: that a man's character determines his fate. This they bring as an axiom to their analysis of drama, and insist on discovering their axiom, as a self-evident principle, in every story. They even quote Scripture for it: Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. But this last is another example of the Fallacy of Quotations. The words appear in Scripture as a gnome or proverb, which is the literary form devoted to expressing partial truths; it is misquotation to cite a proverb as if this were intended for a universal truth. It is of course one of the many tendencies observable in life that what is sown in conduct is likely to be reaped; such reaping of what has been sown always strikes the beholder with profound moral impressiveness. But it is only one tendency out of many: the facts of human life also reveal men failing to reap what they have sown, or again being forced to reap what others have sown. The same Bible which gives us at one point the impressive proverb of sowing and reaping, gives us at another point the not less impressive parable of the sower who goes forth to sow, and tells how some of his seed fell by the wayside, and some into stony ground or among thorns: warning us that what is sown is not always reaped. I touch on this point only to insist that we must come to our study of Shakespeare with an open mind, and gather from each story as it presents itself whatever shall appear as to the connection between character and fate.

When we thus consider side by side the characters of men and the course of events another branch of inquiry will naturally sug-

gest itself. What, in the moral system of Shakespeare, appear to be the forces behind life, determining its issues? Are the consequences of our actions regulated only by general laws, such as those we recognise in the reaction of physical forces? While I hold a ball in my hand, I may choose whether I will throw it to the right or to the left; but when once the ball has left my hand it is seized upon by the law of gravitation and the laws of friction and of projectile curve; nothing but the play of such laws determines where the ball will touch the ground. Is it so with the actions of the moral life? Or is it — as when Arthur threw away Excalibur and a hand appeared from the lake to seize it — that there is an external Will at times interfering with natural consequences of men's acts? Or again, have we assumed too much in saying that while in my hand the ball is in my control? and is it that unconscious forces from within us may have interfered even with the actions we call voluntary? Such questions suggest that the forces of life, so far as they find dramatic expression in Shakespearean plot, make a natural part of his moral system.

One more principle must be indicated as defining the field of the present inquiry. I have so far spoken as if there were no difference between life as it is depicted in the drama and the life of reality. And indeed the common idea that the two are identical has been assisted by a certain image — attributed, by the usual Fallacy of Quotations, to Shakespeare, but in reality carrying only the authority of Hamlet — the description of the stage as "holding up the mirror to nature." The comparison is apt enough for the purpose of Hamlet's speech. But that the drama is not merely a reflection of real life every reader may satisfy himself, by imagining his own life and the life of his household on the day on which he reads these lines reproduced — by phonograph and kinetograph — without any flaw upon some stage: would this be drama? Obviously something would be lacking to make the reproduction of real life into drama, something of the nature of sifting, selection, adaptation. It appears then that drama is not a reflection, but an arranged spectacle. Now a spectacle implies a spectator; and the

whole arrangement is contrived with regard to the spectator's point of view. This standpoint of the spectator enters fundamentally into all dramatic analysis. When we use such elementary terms as 'tragic,' 'comic,' we assume in their use the spectator's view point; we call the experience of Malvolio comic, yet it would be the reverse of comic to Malvolio. When Aristotle gives his famous definition of tragedy, as purifying the emotions of pity and terror by a healthy exercise of them, it is obviously the spectator's emotions with which his definition is concerned. Similarly the present inquiry, besides plot, must give attention to dramatic 'tone' — the technical expression for such differences as tragic, comic, humorous, and all their varieties and shadings. The moral system of Shakespeare will be traced alike in plot, the course of events appearing in the play, and in tone, the sympathetic response of the spectator.

With these preliminary observations the chapters that follow may be left to explain themselves. The inquiry falls into three natural parts. In the first, particular dramas will be presented to illustrate what may be recognised as root ideas in the moral system of Shakespeare. Then the inquiry will widen, and survey the world of Shakespeare's creation in its moral complexity. In the third part will be considered the forces of life in Shakespeare's moral world, so far as these express themselves in dramatic forms, from personal will at one end of the scale to overruling providence at the other end.

BOOK I

ROOT IDEAS OF SHAKESPEARE'S MORAL SYSTEM

CHAPTER I: Heroism and Moral Balance: The first four Histories

CHAPTER II: Wrong and Retribution: The second four Histories

CHAPTER III: Innocence and Pathos: The Tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet*

CHAPTER IV: Wrong and Restoration: The Comedies of *Winter's Tale* and *Cymbeline*

CHAPTER V: The Life Without and the Life Within: The Mask-Tragedy of *Henry the Eighth*

I

HEROISM AND MORAL BALANCE: THE FIRST FOUR HISTORIES

WITHOUT doubt Henry of Monmouth is to be regarded as the grand hero of the Shakespearean world. It is in approaching this theme that the dramatist feels the limitations of dramatic form.

> O for a Muse of fire, that would ascend
> The brightest heaven of invention,
> A kingdom for a stage, princes to act
> And monarchs to behold the swelling scene!
> Then should the warlike Harry, like himself,
> Assume the port of Mars; and at his heels,
> Leash'd in like hounds, should famine, sword and fire
> Crouch for employment.

The historic materials limit what follows to a picture of war. But wise counsellors of the King — not speaking in the presence, which might suggest flattery, but in secret conference with one another — indicate the universal genius of Henry.

> Hear him but reason in divinity,
> And all-admiring with an inward wish
> You would desire the King were made a prelate:
> Hear him debate of commonwealth affairs,
> You would say it hath been all in all his study:
> List his discourse of war, and you shall hear
> A fearful battle render'd you in music:
> Turn him to any cause of policy,
> The Gordian knot of it he will unloose,
> Familiar as his garter: that, when he speaks,
> The air, a charter'd libertine, is still,
> And the mute wonder lurketh in men's ears,
> To steal his sweet and honey'd sentences.[1]

[1] *Henry the Fifth:* I. i. 38.

Thus the great dramatist must needs borrow from a sister art, and narrative poems fill up the intervals between the acts, epic combining with drama to make a medium wide enough for the presentation of the complete hero.

Yet at first sight it might seem as if a great exception would have to be made to the moral greatness of Henry. This kingly figure has been, in his youth, the grief of his father's heart, the prodigal son of court life; affections holding a wing "quite from the flight of all his ancestors" have kept him wasting his years in the riotous living of low taverns and street brawls. But a closer examination of Henry as he is seen developing through the series of plays will put quite another face upon this matter. The truancy of the prince is no more than the wider and fuller nature rebelling against the limitations of worn-out ideals. Bolingbroke and those about him belong to the past; theirs is a life bounded by the narrow horizon of feudalism. Their business is war, and their justice is judicial combat; the war moreover is a war of feudal parties for feudal power. The divinity of kingship is a sentiment with them, but only while it is on their side. Bolingbroke, while he is weak, bends the knee before Richard; when unexpected powers have flocked to his standard he overturns Richard's throne and appropriates the divine kingship to himself. The Percies have been his chief backers in this; the moment the new King turns against their family they discover that Richard was a "sweet rose" and Bolingbroke its "canker." Now Henry of Monmouth has been born into a new era, when the one-sided structure of feudalism is to break down, and society is to find a new equilibrium; his youthful freshness has caught the new interest of human nature itself, the interest of life outside feudal conceptions. Responsibility and the call to action have not yet come; Henry can afford to stand aside, and let the factions eat up one another. Meanwhile, what are attractions to the men of the time have no zest for him: a mere show of feudal life in mimic spectacle as a relief from feudal life in dull earnest. When they tell the prince of the "Oxford triumphs" that were to celebrate successful treason —

> His answer was, he would unto the stews,
> And from the common'st creature pluck a glove,
> And wear it as a favour; and with that
> He would unhorse the lustiest challenger.[1]

All this is but the breath of change stirring, that is to mark a new generation. But curiosity grows in time to be something deeper; slowly observers of Henry come to see that he is "obscuring his contemplation under the veil of wildness."[2]

This is not an afterthought, put forward to excuse a life that has been misspent. The first scene in which we view Henry surrounded by the Falstaff crew ends with a soliloquy.[3]

> I know you all, and will a while uphold
> The unyoked humour of your idleness:
> Yet herein will I imitate the sun,
> Who doth permit the base contagious clouds
> To smother up his beauty from the world,
> That, when he please again to be himself,
> Being wanted, he may be more wonder'd at,
> By breaking through the foul and ugly mists
> Of vapours that did seem to strangle him.

Meanwhile, it is not a case of a Haroun al Raschid viewing low life under protection of night and disguise: Henry casts off all his rank, and meets human nature on its own level. He matches himself against the prince of humorists, and Falstaff can never get the better of him. He goes on to "sound the base-string of humility," and can out-trifle "a leash of drawers."

> They take it already upon their salvation, that though I be but Prince of Wales, yet I am the king of courtesy; and tell me flatly I am no proud Jack, like Falstaff, but a Corinthian, a lad of mettle, a good boy, by the Lord, so they call me, and when I am king of England I shall command all the good lads in Eastcheap.[4]

[1] *Richard the Second:* V. iii. 16.
[2] *Henry the Fifth:* I. i. 63.
[3] *I Henry the Fourth:* I. ii. 219.
[4] *I Henry the Fourth:* II. iv. 9.

Nothing comes in sight but Henry will master it.

> I am now of all humours that have showed themselves humours since the old days of goodman Adam to the pupil age of this present twelve o'clock at midnight.[1]

He is steady in his purpose of being in gay life without being of it; with easy superiority he sits loose to the actions of his comrades, and if these have done damage he repays "with advantage."[2] Henry's claim is that "in everything the purpose must weigh with the folly";[3] and it is a folly that never loses sight of wisdom.

> Well, thus we play the fools with the time, and the spirits of the wise sit in the clouds and mock us.[4]

At last the wiser among the old generation begin to recognise in the prince's life that there is more than appears on the surface.

> *Warwick.* My gracious lord, you look beyond him quite:
> The prince but studies his companions
> Like a strange tongue, wherein, to gain the language,
> 'Tis needful that the most immodest word
> Be look'd upon and learn'd; which once attain'd,
> Your highness knows, comes to no further use
> But to be known and hated. So, like gross terms,
> The prince will in the perfectness of time
> Cast off his followers; and their memory
> Shall as a pattern or a measure live,
> By which his grace must mete the lives of others,
> Turning past evils to advantages.[5]

That a wider and more balanced nature is the explanation of the prince's truancy is the more evident the more he is compared with the men of his age. Henry's father is the last to understand him. Bolingbroke's was a soul tuned to a single string; his serious-

[1] *I Henry the Fourth:* II. iv. 104.
[2] *I Henry the Fourth:* II. iv. 599.
[3] *II Henry the Fourth:* II. ii. 196.
[4] *II Henry the Fourth:* II. ii. 154.
[5] *II Henry the Fourth:* IV. iv. 67.

ness has been an ambition in which the dazzle of the crown has blinded to all moral distinctions; or if he is haunted with a sense of guilt, he cherishes the purpose of a crusade to the Holy Land for atonement. In the long scenes between father and son we have simplicity in the chair of authority, seeking to mould to his own narrowness a character he is unable to fathom. Bolingbroke even goes so far as to hold up to his son the example of his own youthful days.[1] Now we know how Bolingbroke's young manhood impressed contemporaries.

> . . . His courtship to the common people;
> How he did seem to dive into their hearts
> With humble and familiar courtesy . . .
> Off goes his bonnet to an oyster-wench;
> A brace of draymen bid God speed him well
> And had the tribute of his supple knee.[2]

But, with a naïveté worthy of Polonius explaining policy to his servant, King Bolingbroke impresses on his son that all this familiarity had a treasonable purpose under it.

> By being seldom seen, I could not stir
> But like a comet I was wonder'd at;
> That men would tell their children, 'This is he';
> Others would say, 'Where, which is Bolingbroke'?
> And then I stole all courtesy from heaven,
> And dress'd myself in such humility
> That I did pluck allegiance from men's hearts,
> Loud shouts and salutations from their mouths,
> Even in the presence of the crowned King.

Against this as background the reader of the scene feels Henry's pranks to be almost respectable. The prince receives all this long-winded rebuking with filial deference; and these scenes all

[1] *I Henry the Fourth:* III. ii, from 39.
[2] *Richard the Second:* I. iv. 24.

end happily, for the charm of Henry's personal presence is as irresistible to his father as to Falstaff. The last encounter of king and prince is characteristic of the two natures.[1] Bolingbroke, dying, must needs have the golden crown by his bedside, to gaze on to the last. Henry (believing his father dead) places the crown on his own head; little impressed as he has been by the glitter of royalty, now that the crown has come to him by "lineal honour," Henry will guard it against a world in arms, and walks aside to realise the new sense of responsibility. Bolingbroke shrieks at finding his crown gone, and can still see no explanation but the vulgar hurry of a libertine for succession to means of free license. The misunderstanding is easily removed, and then the finally reconciled father gives his son his dying advice: — which is to distract a kingdom with foreign wars as a preventive against too close scrutiny of the royal title.

Or is it with the young men of the time that Henry is to be compared? There is Richard, king *in esse* and not *in posse*, prostituting to his own lusts the divine kingship in which all believe. Or there is Aumerle, faithful plotter for his hero Richard, until the moment of personal danger sends him rushing to Bolingbroke with abject prayers for pardon.[2] There is above all John of Lancaster, who has taken his elder brother's place in council. The Prince of Wales, the moment he obeys the call to arms, becomes the hero of the war; without a spark of rivalry, nevertheless, Henry extols Lancaster's prowess as beyond his own; in the time of victory he obtains the royal permission to release Douglas, and turning over to his brother the office of freeing the prisoner almost warms Lancaster to a sense of generosity. Later on an independent command gives to this "demure boy" an opportunity to show his true nature: Lancaster's fetch of policy proves to be a solemn quibble under which he perpetrates an act of the blackest treachery.[3]

[1] *II Henry the Fourth:* IV. v.
[2] *Richard the Second:* V. ii, iii.
[3] *I Henry the Fourth:* V. iv, v; *II Henry the Fourth:* IV. ii.

It is however Hotspur who is the ideal of youth to Bolingbroke and his feudal generation:

> Amongst a grove, the very straightest plant;
> Who is sweet Fortune's minion and her pride:
> . . . O that it could be proved
> That some night-tripping fairy had exchanged
> In cradle-clothes our children where they lay,
> And call'd mine Percy, his Plantagenet!

Yet viewed from any other standpoint than that of feudalism Hotspur appears to be only a fighting animal, with riotous eloquence to mouth his riotous thoughts. When he rouses his mighty spirit against the King, it is his own fellow-conspirators who speak of him as "drunk with choler," in a "mad heat" pouring forth "a world of figures"; to use his own words, he is "whipp'd and scourged with rods, nettled and stung with pismires" at merely hearing of "this vile politician, Bolingbroke."[1] Careless as to possession, he will nevertheless "cavil on the ninth part of a hair," if it be a question of bargaining.[2] He can respect no type of life but his own: he risks the alliance which is the only hope of his cause in order to mock in Glendower a different tone of grandiosity from his own fire-eating; the ballad which is charming all other ears is to Hotspur no better than the mewing of a cat; it seems to offend his Englishship that a Welshman should talk Welsh.[3] When one after another of the concerted movements fails at the rendezvous Hotspur speaks as if this were encouraging, so great is his itch to fight; it is his own comrades who denounce the imaginative madness which has brought the cause to its ruin.[4] Such mere battle passion seems as irresponsible a thing as Henry's gayeties; it is noteworthy that Percy's word as the sword of his conqueror pierces him is this —

> O, Harry, thou hast robb'd me of *my youth*.[5]

[1] *I Henry the Fourth:* I. iii, whole scene.
[2] *I Henry the Fourth:* III. i. 140. [3] *I Henry the Fourth:* III. i, whole scene.
[4] *I Henry the Fourth:* IV. i. 76–83, and whole scene; *II Henry the Fourth:* I. iii. 26–33. [5] *I Henry the Fourth:* V. iv. 77.

Both the rivals use the much abused word 'honour.'

Hotspur. By heaven, methinks it were an easy leap,
To pluck bright honour from the pale-faced moon,
Or dive into the bottom of the deep,
Where fathom-line could never touch the ground,
And pluck up drowned honour by the locks.

At the climax of his career Percy expresses his conception of such honour:

An if we live, we live to tread on kings;
If die, brave death, when princes die with us![1]

There comes a situation when the other Henry exclaims:

But if it be a sin to covet honour,
I am the most offending soul alive.

The honour he is coveting is the post of cruel danger:

If we are mark'd to die, we are enow
To do our country loss; and if to live,
The fewer men, the greater share of honour.[2]

How do the two Harries appear when the course of events brings them across one another's path? They tell Hotspur of the prince in arms against his cause: he pours contempt upon the "sword-and-buckler Prince of Wales," and, but that the King loves him not, he would have him poisoned with a pot of ale. Prince Henry's generous praise of his rival is reported: Hotspur is unmoved, and can only conceive of the advancing general as a wild libertine.[3] Meanwhile the King has extolled Hotspur to his son, and the easy prince at last takes fire.

Percy is but my factor, good my lord,
To engross up glorious deeds on my behalf;

[1] *I Henry the Fourth:* I. iii. 201; V. ii. 86.
[2] *Henry the Fifth:* IV. iii. 20, 28.
[3] *I Henry the Fourth:* IV. i, from 94; V. ii, from 46.

> And I will call him to so strict account,
> That he shall render every glory up,
> Yea, even the slightest worship of his time,
> Or I will tear the reckoning from his heart.

Henry plunges into the war, moves straight to his rival, redeems his boast to the letter; and then makes so little of achievement that he laughs while Falstaff appropriates the deed to himself.[1]

Or there is in the Dauphin another example of correct young manhood. Like Hotspur, the Dauphin cannot conceive of any type of life different from his own; what has not been drawn to its model must needs be "a vain, giddy, shallow, humorous youth"; his seniors in vain seek to convince him by facts.[2] It is clear that the French prince has never known youth as a period of freedom and moral choice; his life has merely been passing through stages of development of the feudal warrior. What idealising power he possesses runs to the glorification of his horse.

> Ca, ha! he bounds from the earth as if his entrails were hairs . . . he trots the air; the earth sings when he touches it; the basest horn of his hoof is more musical than the pipe of Hermes. . . . He is pure air and fire; and the dull elements of earth and water never appear in him, but only in patient stillness while his rider mounts him. . . . The man hath no wit that cannot, from the rising of the lark to the lodging of the lamb, vary deserved praise on my palfrey: it is a theme as fluent as the sea: turn the sands into eloquent tongues, and my horse is argument for them all.

Yet, when the chivalrous magnificence of this prince is pricked by the point of close observation, it seems to collapse into a somewhat dubious courage, and this on the testimony of military comrades.

Orleans. The Dauphin longs for morning.
Rambures. He longs to eat the English.

[1] *I Henry the Fourth:* III. ii. 147; V. iv. 161, and whole scene.
[2] *Henry the Fifth:* II. iv. 30.

Constable. I think he will eat all he kills.
Orleans. By the white hand of my lady, he's a gallant prince.
Constable. Swear by her foot, that she may tread out the oath.
Orleans. He is simply the most active gentleman in France.
Constable. Doing is activity; and he will still be doing.
Orleans. He never did any harm, that I heard of.
Constable. Nor will do none to-morrow: he will keep that good name still.
Orleans. I know him to be valiant.
Constable. I was told that by one that knows him better than you.
Orleans. What's he?
Constable. Marry, he told me so himself; and he said he cared not who knew it.[1]

These are the types of the old nobility with which Henry's youth refused to be in tune. It is abundantly evident that all these have taken up the strenuous life simply by reason of their limitations; this was all that they had in them to do. When the call comes Henry proves the most strenuous of them all: he keeps his warlike father from a faint-hearted retreat,[2] and is as easily superior to his military comrades as he has been to Falstaff and Poins. But Henry has the larger nature, in which action is balanced by repose, accepted ideals can reinforce themselves by curiosity and fresh interest in the raw material of human nature. To the successive generations of men youth ever comes as the period of exploration, the *wanderjahre* during which new ingredients may be absorbed for crystallisation into a richer compound; nature's great barrier against a specialisation which would settle into hereditary caste. In this sense Henry's is a natural youth. But to say this is of course not to justify all that the prince does in his adventurous nonage. The master temptation of the young is the desire to see life for themselves; like the hero of *Ecclesiastes*, they will plunge into folly carrying their wisdom with them. Henry himself does not come scathless through the ordeal; on his own principles the attack upon the Chief Justice is an outrage,

[1] *Henry the Fifth:* III. vii, whole scene. [2] *I Henry the Fourth:* V. iv.

an outrage atoned for at the moment by submission, and afterwards by the promotion of his rebuker. But the 'wildness' of the prince has been a symptom of moral vigour, and its issue has been moral enrichment. Not for a moment has Henry been under any spell of deception; he has humorously recognised that he must suppress deeper feelings which the best of his associates were incapable of understanding.[1] There is thus no miracle in the ease with which he drops them.

Being awaked, I do despise my dream.[2]

But men are known by their dreams. When the new type of king is on the throne it is found that his father's enemies "have steeped their galls in honey";[3] the wide human sympathies of Henry have established his throne upon the broad basis of a people's love.

The play of *Henry the Fifth* presents the moral hero in the new life of responsibility. It is the same breadth and balance of human nature that is the fundamental impression. The fate of history makes the reign a single achievement of war. But with Henry action must be balanced by council. What the first act presents is a total contrast to all that the dying advice of Bolingbroke had forecast; it is bishops and aged statesmen who are urging on war, the King "in the very May-morn of his youth" who is holding back with moral scruples and far-reaching policy. The moral question is one of "the law of nature and of nations," as the world then understood them, and the learned Canterbury is the legal adviser who must expound. But Henry makes the most solemn of appeals for a disinterested judgment.

And God forbid, my dear and faithful lord,
That you should fashion, wrest, or bow your reading,
Or nicely charge your understanding soul
With opening titles miscreate, whose right

[1] *II Henry the Fourth:* II. ii. 35–74.
[2] *II Henry the Fourth:* V. v. 55.
[3] *Henry the Fifth:* II. ii. 30.

> Suits not in native colours with the truth . . .
> Under this conjuration speak, my lord;
> For we will hear, note and believe in heart
> That what you speak is in your conscience wash'd
> As pure as sin with baptism.

When in answer Canterbury has made his exposition of the Salic law, the King still forces his council to look all round the question to the furthest consequences of action. There comes at last a point where deliberation may crystallise into decisive resolution.

> Now are we well resolved; and, by God's help,
> And yours, the noble sinews of our power,
> France being ours, we'll bend it to our awe,
> Or break it all to pieces.

Not until now, when the rights of the question have been debated in calmness to a settlement, does Henry admit the embassy from the Dauphin. He listens to the studied insult with dignity; in answer, he first meets the jester on his own ground and outjests him.

> When we have match'd our rackets to these balls,
> We will, in France, by God's grace, play a set
> Shall strike his father's crown into the hazard.
> Tell him, he hath made a match with such a wrangler
> That all the courts of France will be disturb'd
> With chaces.

The hint at the wildness of his youth Henry turns against the Dauphin.

> We never valued this poor seat of England . . .
> But tell the Dauphin I will keep my state,
> Be like a king and show my sail of greatness
> When I do rouse me in my throne of France.

But, his indignation excited at such playing with edge tools of war and national devastation, Henry goes on to the thought that the jest has turned tennis-balls to gun-stones:

> For many a thousand widows
> Shall this his mock mock out of their dear husbands
> Mock mothers from their sons, mock castles down . . .
> His jest will savour but of shallow wit,
> When thousands weep more than did laugh at it.

It is important, for the ideal character of the whole picture, that this incident is held back to its proper place. Calm deliberation has yielded to decisive resolution; only then may the adversary's insolence be used to carry forward resolution to the white heat of passion.

For a moment there is an obstruction in the current of events, and heroism is seen against a background of treason. What gives dramatic impressiveness to the second act is this, that the evil is just as broad and ideal as is the good against which it is arrayed: the passage that follows reads as a counterpart to the bishops' expatiation upon Henry's perfections.

> Whatsoever cunning fiend it was
> That wrought upon thee so preposterously
> Hath got the voice in hell for excellence.
> . . . . . Show men dutiful?
> Why, so didst thou: seem they grave and learned?
> Why, so didst thou: come they of noble family?
> Why, so didst thou: seem they religious?
> Why, so didst thou: or are they spare in diet,
> Free from gross passion or of mirth or anger,
> Constant in spirit, not swerving with the blood,
> Garnish'd and deck'd in modest complement,
> Not working with the eye without the ear,
> And but in purged judgment trusting neither?
> Such and so finely bolted didst thou seem:
> And thus thy fall hath left a kind of blot,
> To mark the full-fraught man and best indued
> With some suspicion. I will weep for thee;
> For this revolt of thine, methinks, is like
> Another fall of man.

From the third act the character of Henry is seen concentrated in action: he who was so "modest in exception" can now be "terrible in constant resolution." Here, as ever, the force of the character seems to lie in its balance: the most opposite qualities blend in unity of purpose.

> In peace there's nothing so becomes a man
> As modest stillness and humility:
> But when the blast of war blows in our ears,
> Then imitate the action of the tiger;
> Stiffen the sinews, summon up the blood,
> Disguise fair nature with hard-favour'd rage . . .
> Hold hard the breath, and bend up every spirit
> To his full height.

As the spirit of peace can be made a foil for the spirit of war, so in Henry mercy lends wings to fury; in the general conduct of war Henry acts on the principle that "when lenity and cruelty play for a kingdom the gentler gamester is the soonest winner," and for that very reason on the eve of storm and assault he can hold over the hesitating foe the inevitable horrors of the flesh'd soldier, in liberty of bloody hand ranging with conscience wide as hell. The many-sided nature of the King has drawn to him all types and orders of men; those descended from fathers of war-proof he bids dishonour not their mothers, the good yeomen "whose limbs were made in England" he calls upon to show the mettle of their pasture; the varied ranks around their leader stand "like greyhounds in the slips straining upon the start." Where in preceding reigns history has been war of factions, we have in the war of this play English, Scotch, Welsh, Irish, all blending into a harmony of national prowess and enthusiasm, Welsh Fluellen leading the hero worship with his fantastic glorification of Alexander of Macedon and Harry of Monmouth.[1]

But the fulness of Henry's character can be brought out only by trouble. From the centre of the play we hear of pestilence

[1] *Henry the Fifth*: IV. vii.

and famine: the famous night piece that ushers in the fourth act presents the "poor condemned English," on the night before the battle, sitting patiently like sacrifices by their camp fires, while the overwhelming hosts of the enemy are staking to the throw of the dice their captives of the morrow.

> O now, who will behold
> The royal captain of this ruin'd band
> Walking from watch to watch, from tent to tent,
> Let him cry, 'Praise and glory on his head!'
> For forth he goes and visits all his host,
> Bids them good morrow with a modest smile,
> And calls them brothers, friends and countrymen.
> Upon his royal face there is no note
> How dread an army hath enrounded him;
> Nor doth he dedicate one jot of colour
> Unto the weary and all-watched night,
> But freshly looks and overbears attaint
> With cheerful semblance and sweet majesty:
> That every wretch, pining and pale before,
> Beholding him, plucks comfort from his looks.

Through the whole of the terrible crisis the force of the army is the spirit of its King, responsive to every note heard around him, adequate to every call. He greets with dignity a group of his nobles, pointing to the first streaks of dawn:

> There is some soul of goodness in things evil . . .
> For our bad neighbour makes us early stirrers.

He turns to accost a venerable figure.

> *Henry.* Good morrow, old Sir Thomas Erpingham:
> A good soft pillow for that good white head
> Were better than a churlish turf of France.
> *Erp.* Not so, my liege: this lodging likes me better,
> Since I may say, "Now lie I like a King."

With familiarity that charms the old man Henry borrows his cloak, and in muffled disguise continues his passage through the host.

He has a bout of camp wit with the unsuspecting Pistol, and hears his own praises in the old Eastcheap slang. He marks some pedantic fussiness of Fluellen as he passes along, and sees beneath it good qualities to be noted for the future. Then he gets into a long chat with a company of English soldiers, and delights to keep in play the irony of the discussion about the KING: how —

> Though I speak it to you, I think the King is but a man, as I am: the violet smells to him as it doth to me; the element shows to him as it doth to me.

how, one suggests, —

> If the cause be not good, the King hath a heavy reckoning to make, when all those legs and arms and heads, chopped off in a battle, shall join together at the latter day. . . .

how, on the contrary, —

> Every subject's duty is the King's; but every subject's soul is his own. Therefore should every soldier in the wars do as every sick man in his bed, wash every mote out of his conscience: and dying so, death is to him advantage; or not dying, the time was blessedly lost wherein such preparation was gained.

The thrill that goes through the circle by the camp fire at these last words changes to laughter and rough sarcasm, when Henry slips for a moment into a royal tone that seems out of keeping with his disguise; in another moment the King, half angry and half amused, finds himself shoved out of the circle, with a gage in his hand which he has sworn to fight out after the battle. But, left alone, he realises with acute anguish the weight of responsibility all are putting upon "the King"; and how this King is but a single human heart, hidden under the thin veil of ceremony. A call to battle is heard, and self-consciousness for an instant becomes an agony of penitence — not for his own sins, but for his father's,

which may be visited on him.[1] In another moment he is with his army. Westmoreland has just wished for one ten thousand of those men who will be idle in England that day. Henry will have not one more.

> Rather proclaim it, Westmoreland, through my host,
> That he which hath no stomach to this fight,
> Let him depart; his passport shall be made
> And crowns for convoy put into his purse:
> We would not die in that man's company
> That fears his fellowship to die with us.

Before Henry has finished his picture of the coming battle, as a privilege to be jealously guarded like a vested interest, the same Westmoreland wishes that the King and he could fight the battle all by themselves; with laughing arithmetical confusion Henry says he has unwished five thousand men.

At this point the arrival of the herald brings the spirit of the enemy as a foil to the heroism of Henry.[2] The tone of the French army has throughout been the pride that goes before a fall. They are sorry that the English numbers are so few, that there is not work enough for all hands; the superfluous lackeys of their host, they declare, are enough to purge the field of such a hilding foe.

> For our losses, his exchequer is too poor; for the effusion of our blood, the muster of his kingdom too faint a number; and for our disgrace, his own person, kneeling at our feet, but a weak and worthless satisfaction.[3]

What the herald who brings messages like this has to encounter is a patient dignity flavoured with humour.

> *Henry.* Bid them achieve me and then sell my bones.
> Good God! why should they mock poor fellows thus?
> The man that once did sell the lion's skin
> While the beast lived, was kill'd with hunting him.

[1] *Henry the Fifth:* IV. i. 309. [2] IV. iii. 79. [3] III. vi. 140.

The brag of superior numbers is at best a poor thing: there is something heroic in the braggartism of desperation.

> We are but warriors for the working-day;
> Our gayness and our gilt are all besmirch'd
> With rainy marching in the painful field;
> There's not a piece of feather in our host —
> Good argument, I hope, we will not fly —
> And time hath worn us into slovenry:
> But, by the mass, our hearts are in the trim;
> And my poor soldiers tell me, yet ere night
> They'll be in fresher robes, or they will pluck
> The gay new coats o'er the French soldiers' heads
> And turn them out of service.

From inspection of host and reception of herald we glide insensibly into the scenes of the battle; but, whatever phase of war may be uppermost, Henry is the soul of it all. Now he is weeping over the story of York and Suffolk, how they kissed one another's gashes, as they died together, first fruits of the slaughter; now he is loudly proclaiming his Welsh birth to humour the valiant Fluellen; now he is holding back the rejoicings of his soldiers until victory is more decisive.[1] He responds without a moment's hesitation to the most terrible demands that the accursed business of war can make: once, when he orders retaliation[2] for the slaughter of non-combatants; once, when the weakness of inferior numbers obliges him to threaten — happily, only to threaten — slaughter of prisoners in order to dislodge a band of the enemy from an inaccessible position.[3] With the rising spirits of unmistakable victory the army becomes as skittish as a mob of schoolboys: Henry gives vent to

[1] *Henry the Fifth:* IV. vi, etc.

[2] So I understand the order at the end of IV. vi. French reinforcements, instead of meeting the English, have joined the fugitives, and the two together have fallen upon the non-combatants of the English camp. So the incident is understood by Fluellen (IV. vii. 1–10): this great stickler for principle in martial law entirely approves Henry's action. This explanation is also favoured by concluding lines of IV. iv.

[3] IV. vii. 58.

the feeling in his practical joke of handing his gage to the unconscious Fluellen to redeem, and getting his pomposity a box on the ears from honest Bates, care being taken that no untoward consequences shall follow.[1] In the midst of hilarity comes the French herald, and the first precise news of the day's fortune: as the terrible slaughter of the enemy and the small English loss are made known, high spirits give place to solemn awe: —

O God, thy arm was here!

Henry proclaims it death to boast of this victory, or to take from God the praise that is his only.

It remains for the fifth act to display yet another side of Henry's character; as action was at the commencement of the play balanced by council, so at its close war becomes a foil to love. The scene of wooing in broken English and broken French has always been a popular favourite. One of its chief charms is that it brings out the tact of the hero. Katherine is unmistakably the prize of war: Henry, who has been exalted by the bishops as commanding every kind of eloquence, chooses to woo her with the bluntness of the soldier, veiling tenderness under rough simplicity.

> If I could win a lady at leap-frog, or by vaulting into my saddle with my armour on my back, under the correction of bragging be it spoken, I should quickly leap into a wife. . . . And, while thou livest, dear Kate, take a fellow of plain and uncoined constancy; for he perforce must do thee right, because he hath not the gift to woo in other places: for these fellows of infinite tongue, that can rhyme themselves into ladies' favours, they do always reason themselves out again. . . . A good leg will fall; a straight back will stoop; a black beard will turn white; a curled pate will grow bald; a fair face will wither; a full eye will wax hollow: but a good heart, Kate, is the sun and the moon; or rather the sun, and not the moon; for it shines bright and never changes, but keeps his course truly. If thou would have such a one, take me; and take me, take a soldier; take a soldier, take a King.

[1] IV. vii. 178, and whole scene.

The effect of the whole scene is that, at the close of the story, conquest presents itself as a marriage of those two countries —

> . . . whose very shores look pale
> With envy of each other's happiness.

It was with something like a flourish of the dramatic trumpet that we saw ushered in the protagonist of the Shakespearean stage. The heroism of character that has been thus presented has been found to consist, not in the grand passion of a Hotspur, plucking honour from heights and depths; nor in the unparalleled achievements of mediæval romance; nor in the infinite patience of the lives of the saints. Its foundation seems to be breadth of human nature, with freshness to expand the horizon when responsibility is not calling for action. Its chief note is a moral balance, that will not allow action to overpower council, nor the spirit of war to eclipse the spirit of peace; that is responsive alike to dignity and to humour, to pathos and to fun. It is the heroism of the full soul, not consciously ambitious even of moral greatness, yet adequate to every demand.

II

WRONG AND RETRIBUTION: THE SECOND FOUR HISTORIES

THE Shakespearean Drama contains a series of eight consecutive plays presenting English history; the series divides into two tetralogies, between which there is one curious parallel. Three plays of the first tetralogy, as we have seen, cover the developing period of a nature that, in the fourth play, rises to supreme heroism. Similarly, in the second tetralogy, the triple play of *Henry the Sixth* gives us successive stages of an advance towards an individuality which is presented, in the play that follows, as ideal villany.

The parallel must however not be pressed; for, whatever may be the precise facts as to the authorship of the three parts of *Henry the Sixth*, it is felt by many readers that they do not make a continuous and consistent scheme like that of the other trilogy. The contents of the plays are crude history, with elementary passions and melodramatic incident: for the most part scenes of factious turbulence, and civil wars in which father kills son, and son father. The heroes are such as butcher Clifford, thundering blood and death; or his son, in cruelty seeking out his fame; or wind-changing Warwick, setter up and setter down of kings; or the "tiger's heart wrapp'd in a woman's hide" of Margaret, antipodal to all that is good. Amongst these are plunged from their earliest youth the "forward sons of York": Richard is the most forward of them all.[1] There is that which marks him off from all the rest of his handsome family. He is a "valiant crook-back prodigy," a "heap of wrath, foul indigested lump"[2]; the language is the

[1] *III Henry the Sixth:* I. i. 203.

[2] *II Henry the Sixth:* V. i. 157; *III Henry the Sixth:* I. iv. 75; etc.

bitter satire of enemies, but Richard's own soliloquies[1] are enough to show that his physique is either an outward symbol of a distorted soul, or else an accident that contributes its share to the prince's predisposition towards evil. In the earlier pictures of Richard we can see, with much that is merely boyish, suggestions of the strength and the moral distortion that are to combine later into consummate villany. In warlike deeds he is early pronounced by his father to have deserved best of the sons.[2] In council we have him struggling to be beforehand with his elders, and he leaves them far behind in audacity of moral perversion.

York. I took an oath that he should quietly reign.
Edward. But for a kingdom any oath may be broken:
I would break a thousand oaths to reign one year.
Richard. No; God forbid your grace should be forsworn.
York. I shall be, if I claim by open war.
Richard. I'll prove the contrary, if you'll hear me speak.
York. Thou canst not, son; it is impossible.
Richard. An oath is of no moment, being not took
Before a true and lawful magistrate,
That hath authority over him that swears:
Henry had none, but did usurp the place;
Then, seeing 'twas he that made you to depose,
Your oath, my lord, is vain and frivolous.[3]

It is just here that we get our first glimpse of the master passion beneath this boy's vigorous personality.

And, father, do but think
How sweet a thing it is to wear a crown;
Within whose circuit is Elysium
And all that poets feign of bliss and joy.

Richard is dominated by ambition; but at present it is within the bounds of vehement partisanship, sympathy with the ambition of his father. And in the earlier scenes Richard seems not devoid

[1] *III Henry the Sixth:* III. ii. 153; V. vi. 70; *Richard the Third:* I. i. 14; etc.
[2] *III Henry the Sixth:* I. i. 17. [3] *III Henry the Sixth:* I. ii. 15.

of natural feelings; though side by side with these are also suggestions of what will be the demonic levity of the fully developed villain. He has freshness of soul enough to become enthusiastic about a brilliant sunrise;[1] but when the natural sun turns into the miraculous omen of three suns, and his elder brother exclaims —

> Whate'er it bodes, henceforward I will bear
> Upon my target three fair-shining suns —

Richard instantly comes out with a pun at Edward's expense —

> Nay, bear three daughters: by your leave I speak it,
> You love the breeder better than the male.

There is room for bitter taunts as the brothers stand over the fallen body of their father's torturer and their brother's murderer, but with Richard the taunt can become a gibe:

> What, not an oath? nay, then the world goes hard
> When Clifford cannot spare his friends an oath.[2]

Richard seems to be sincere — though we cannot be sure — in his hero-worship of Warwick and Northumberland,[3] and when he deems it prize enough to be his valiant father's son.[4] Nay, there even seems to be a point at which he is open to the touch of popular superstition, and in the moment of being ennobled shrinks from the 'ominous' dukedom of Gloucester.[5]

The turning-point in the movement of the third play is found where King Edward succumbs to the charms of Lady Grey, and by a mésalliance alienates his strong supporters, and causes the current of events to flow backward. This is a turning-point also for Richard: a long soliloquy[6] reveals the changing character, the constituent elements precipitating into a unity of unscrupulous ambition. The new suggestion of royal offspring brings out, with

[1] *III Henry the Sixth:* II. i, from 25.
[2] *III Henry the Sixth:* II. vi, from 31.
[3] *III Henry the Sixth:* II. i. 148, 186.
[4] *III Henry the Sixth:* II. i. 20.
[5] *III Henry the Sixth:* II. vi. 107.
[6] *III Henry the Sixth:* III. ii, from 124.

a shock, the personal hopes that had been silently forming in the breast of the remoter heir.

> Would he were wasted, marrow, bones and all,
> That from his loins no hopeful branch may spring,
> To cross me from the golden time I look for!

This thought yields to the natural reflection on the number of personages who already — without waiting for possibilities — stand between Richard and his soul's desire; until sovereignty seems but a dream:

> Like one that stands upon a promontory
> And spies a far-off shore where he would tread,
> Wishing his foot were equal with his eye,
> And chides the sea that sunders him from thence.

With empty impatience he says to himself in reference to these obstacles to his rise —

> I'll cut the causes off,
> Flattering me with impossibilities.

He turns to other alternatives: but the bitter thought of his deformity comes to check aspirations after a life of pleasure.

> I'll make my heaven to dream upon the crown,
> And, while I live, to account this world but hell,
> Until my mis-shaped trunk that bears this head
> Be round impaled with a glorious crown.

But again Richard is plunged in despair at the many lives that "stand between me and home." He struggles out of the tormenting perplexity by a review of his resources — resources of his own personal qualities: the passage may perhaps, in our contrast, stand as counterpart to the bishops' laudation of the universal powers of Henry the Fifth.

> Why, I can smile, and murder whiles I smile,
> And cry 'Content' to that which grieves my heart,
> And wet my cheeks with artificial tears,
> And frame my face to all occasions.

I'll drown more sailors than the mermaid shall;
I'll slay more gazers than the basilisk;
I'll play the orator as well as Nestor,
Deceive more slily than Ulysses could,
And like a Sinon take another Troy.
I can add colours to the chameleon,
Change shapes with Proteus for advantages,
And set the murderous Machiavel to school.
Can I do this, and cannot get a crown?

Here then a clear stage in his development has been completely attained by Richard: he is a man of one idea and one ambition, consciously emancipated from all moral scruples.

In the latter half of the play, if there is a note of ambiguity in Richard's action, it is the ambiguity of the part he has set himself to play: he is hostile to the King, faithful to the crown, with the faithfulness of the butcher to the sheep he means to eat. Richard seconds, or even leads, in the discontent at the royal marriage, until Clarence has reached the point of threatening open rupture, when Richard draws back:

I hear, yet say not much, but think the more.[1]

The fruit of this ill-fated marriage becomes manifest in the revolt of Warwick, Clarence deserting to him. Richard remains with the King, "not for the love of Edward, but the crown."[2] In the rapidly changing events that succeed, Richard is the follower who pushes his leader forward from point to point. In the tragedy of young Prince Edward's assassination[3] Richard has no greater share than his brothers; the difference is that these brothers have exhausted their souls by this horror, Richard has but whetted his appetite.

Q. Margaret. O, kill me too!
Gloucester. Marry, and shall. [*Offers to kill her.*

Held back by main force from this atrocity, the resources of Gloucester have found him another.

[1] *III Henry the Sixth:* IV. i. 83. [2] IV. i. 126. [3] V. v.

Gloucester. Clarence, excuse me to the king my brother;
I'll hence to London on a serious matter.

They all understand, but none dares follow to the assassination of a king.

We thus reach the crowning incident of the trilogy, as it were the graduating exercise of Richard's education in villany. He has long been a man of one ambition; but, so far as the path of his ambition is concerned, the single quick stab in which Richard has had so much practice would be all that is required. Wherefore then the long protracted scene?[1] The peaceful Henry is no bad reader of men, and he catches exactly the spirit of the incident with his question —

What scene of death hath Roscius now to act?

There is now artistic appreciation of the villany, as well as ambitious purpose to indicate the crime. With Mephistophelean restraint of passion the murderer gravely mocks his victim from point to point; when the helpless Henry in his outpouring has passed from bitter taunts and descriptions of hideous deformity to enumeration of the evils the monster is ordained to bring on his country, the point has been reached for the dramatic coup:

Gloucester. I'll hear no more: die, prophet, in thy speech: [*Stabs him.*
For this, amongst the rest, was I ordain'd.

Richard mocks the aspiring blood of Lancaster sinking into the earth, and then with a superfluous stab starts a summary of the whole situation.

Down, down to hell; and say I sent thee thither:
I, that have neither pity, love, nor fear.
Indeed, 'tis true that Henry told me of;
For I have often heard my mother say
I came into the world with my legs forward:
Had I not reason, think ye, to make haste,
And seek their ruin that usurp'd our right?

[1] *III Henry the Sixth*: V. vi.

The midwife wonder'd and the women cried
'O, Jesus bless us, he is born with teeth!'
And so I was: which plainly signified
That I should snarl and bite and play the dog.
Then, since the heavens have shaped my body so,
Let hell make crook'd my mind to answer it.
I have no brother, I am like no brother;
And this word 'love,' which greybeards call divine,
Be resident in men like one another
And not in me: I am myself alone.

It is natural to place this soliloquy side by side with that of the third act. In the one, Richard devoted himself to ambition, at whatever cost of villanous action; in the other, the villany is embraced. In the third act there was enumeration, in the nature of a claim, of qualities suitable to evil deeds; in the fifth act the claim has been vouched for by the dripping sword and murdered King. In the third act Richard aspired: in the fifth act Richard has attained.

We pass to the play which takes its name from Richard,[1] and almost the first words we hear are these:

I am determined to prove a villain.

As the opening of *Henry the Fifth* presented what seemed to outside observers a sudden conversion, so these words mark the end of development, and announce a character complete in its kind. What exactly is the process that has been thus completed? It is the common phenomenon of human nature by which things that have been means to an end come in time to be an end in themselves. A man takes up a laborious business, with the distinct motive of providing a competence or even means of luxury; as the years go on, the business itself and the attraction of wealth-making become uppermost; worth his millions, the

[1] The play of *Richard the Third* as a study of retribution has been worked out at length in Chapters IV, V of my *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist*. See above, page v.

man continues to labour; he enjoys of course such luxuries as his means afford, but the business, not the luxury, has become the motive. So Richard began with the commonplace motive of ambition, learning for the sake of his ambition to do evil deeds; by the end of the trilogy the evil itself has come to be the attraction; he continues of course to remove obstacles barring him from the crown, and to defend it when won, but evil itself, not ambition, has become the master passion. The new play gives us ideal villany in the sense that villany has itself become the ideal. Richard has become an artist in evil: the natural emotions attending crime — whether of passionate longing, or horror and remorse — have given place to artistic appreciation of masterpieces. And another element of the ideal is added: that of success. The cumulative effect of successive victories surrounds the hero with an air of irresistibility that makes him even more irresistible.

A moral system, we have seen, involves the association of character with fate; when our conception of character is complete we naturally ask, What sort of fate is there meted out in this play? Our first thought is of retribution. Retribution is a fundamental idea in morals. It amounts almost to an instinct: the smallest child feels a virtuous impulse to slap the table against which it has stumbled. And in traditional philosophy wise men have sought to make the whole moral government of the universe synonymous with the judgment on the sinner. In the case before us many readers of Shakespeare feel that the play is defective in this very point. The fate of Richard is very much like the fate of other men: where is there any retribution commensurate with the ideal picture of wrong?

Such a feeling seems to betray a mistaken way of looking at things, the mistake being equally one of morals and of dramatic interpretation. In real life such a feeling has led, in past ages, to the institution of judicial torture. Human life is so precious (such has been the unconscious argument) that one who simply murders another deserves death; what then is to be done in the

case where to murder is added long contriving malice, with aggravations of cruel detail, or violations of gratitude and ties of kinship? Hence human justice has devised the stake and the apparatus of torture, and outraged loyalty has demanded that the slayer of a Cœur-de-Lion shall be flayed alive. Modern enlightenment has discarded all such devices; it has learned to look away from the nice weighing of individual guilt and punishment to the field of morals as a whole, as the sphere in which principle is to triumph. Now the dramatic equivalent for this "field of morals as a whole" is plot. Each play is a microcosm, and the providential government swaying in that microcosm is to be found only when the complexity of the play has been analysed into a unity of design. It is the failure to found dramatic interpretation upon the study of plot that has led to dissatisfaction with Shakespeare's treatment of this story. When the play has been fully analysed it will appear that, in this case, the whole government of the universe is placed before us as a complex scheme, of which the single underlying principle is retribution.

To begin with, the action and experience which make up the story of the play are enveloped in the wider life of history, which both fringes them round and links this to the other plays of the series. The history is the Wars of the Roses: and this history is presented by Shakespeare as retributive history. In the heart of the drama Margaret's curses emphasise the thought that what the various personages of this Yorkist story are suffering at one another's hands is retribution upon the whole house of York for their earlier cruelty to Lancastrians; Richard's retort upon Margaret is a reminder that such cruelty to Lancastrians was itself nemesis upon them for still earlier outrages upon Yorkists.[1] Thus history is made to take the form of the pendulum swing of retribution between one and the other of the sinful factions. Again, a similar spirit is read into the experience of the crowd of inferior personages who make the underplot of the play. Naturalists love to dwell upon the chain of destruction that binds together the

[1] *Richard the Third:* I. iii. 174, and whole scene.

grades of animal life: tiny humming-bird seized by tarantula, tarantula gripped by lizard, lizard made victim of snake, snake pounced upon by hawk, hawk yielding to eagle, which in turn is brought down by the human rifle. A similar chain of retribution is being forged when Clarence, deserter to the Yorkist house, meets his death at the hands of the Yorkist King, and gives a triumph to the Queen's kindred; the Queen's kindred, through the shock of Clarence's death, lose the King, their only protector, and suffer the taunting gibes of Hastings; Hastings, visited by an exactly similar doom, is laughed at by Buckingham in his security; the secure Buckingham is cast off by a doom as taunting as that of Hastings.[1] These repeated strokes of doom, moreover, are not merely sentences of death: in each single case there is a sudden recognition of the forgotten principles of justice, or an appreciation of some bitter irony:[2] fate seems to move forward with the rhythmic march of nemesis. Thus, apart even from the case of Richard himself, the plot of the play is an intricate network of retribution in its varied aspects — a pendulum of nemesis, a chain of retribution, a rhythm of retributive justice.

When our analysis enlarges to take in Richard, he is at once recognised as the motive force of the play: all these multiplied retributions are, directly or indirectly, forwarded in their course by the agency of the hero. Unconsciously to himself, this Richard, whose villany has been such an outrage upon our sense of justice, has been chief factor in a scheme of retribution. In the language of ancient prophecy, he is the Hammer of God: brute force suffered to continue as a purifier of evil, until its work is done, and it can itself be purified out of the world.

But what of Richard when he changes from the agent to the victim of nemesis? It might have been so ordered that the earth should open its mouth and swallow up the monster: in which case

[1] Compare in *Richard the Third:* II. i. 131; II. ii. 62; III. iv. 15–95; III. i, from 157; III. ii. 114; IV. ii; V. i.

[2] *E.g.* I. iv. 66; III. iii. 15; and especially V. i. 10–22. Compare generally my *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist*, pages 114–8.

there would have been a moment's pang, and all would have been over. Or the resourceful brain of a sensational novelist might have contrived some exquisite bodily torment to clutch Richard in its fangs: and then the reader, in spite of himself, would have felt the gates of his sympathy opening, and the hunchback villain might have come out a hero, such as Shylock in his misfortunes is to many readers of *The Merchant of Venice*. Shakespeare's treatment of the present case is very different. Richard is an artist in evil, who plays with human life: accordingly Destiny plays with Richard. Fate hides itself, until — long past the centre of the poem — the crowned villain has attained an impregnable sense of security; then comes the first sign of change, and the name of Richmond has only to be mentioned for memories to flash upon Richard, how the destined avenger has been the theme of prophecies which the victim never realised till too late.[1] From this point the play becomes a series of alternating rumours, rumours of success as well as failure, in order that hope may quicken sensitiveness to despair. Gradually the King is driven from his magnificent imperturbability; he loses temper, he makes mistakes, he casts about for devices, he changes his mind, he feverishly takes refuge in drink: in a word, he consciously recognises the stages of his descent to the commonplace.[2] And all this is but dramatic preparation, leading up to the climax of retribution.

This climax is of course the Night Scene.[3] Its force rests upon the moral principle underlying the career of Richard: it is an assertion of individual will against the order of the universe. All ordinary restraints upon individual will — sympathy, inherited affections, remorse — Richard has learned to cast off: his position seems impregnable. But he has forgotten that there are conditions under which the will is unable to act; and these are found, not in some remote combination of unlikely circumstances, but

[1] IV. ii. 88–122.

[2] Compare such passages as IV. iv. 444–56; 509–18; V. iii. 1–8; 47–70.

[3] V. iii, from 118. Compare also IV. i. 85.

in the most commonplace of everyday conditions — sleep. All other powers may be in full activity when we slumber: the will is entirely paralysed. Hence when Richard, in the weariness of the night before the battle, drops asleep, he is held as in a vice by Destiny, while outraged humanity asserts itself. In his helplessness he must see the rhythmic procession of his victims, counting up the crimes that are to be remembered in the morrow's doom; still helpless, he must watch the ghostlike figures pass over to the opposite camp, foreshadowing the desertion to the foe, whom they bless as the coming victor. If the sleeping powers turn from passive to active, it is but to take part against the helpless sleeper in the play of Destiny upon its victim. Now he is fleeing from the battle and his horse has failed him; another horse secured, he cannot mount for the streaming of his open wounds.[1] Another quick change of dream movement, and all around is shining with the livid gleam of hell fire,[2] and there goes up a groan —

> Have mercy, Jesu!

It has broken the spell: but there is still to be traversed the horrible stage of the gradual awakening from nightmare, and the ghastly dialogue of the two selves is heard — the suppressed self of inherited humanity, and the artificial callousness so painfully built up. In time his will recovers control: but meanwhile Richard himself recognises the shattered nerves with which he is to meet his final fall:

> By the apostle Paul, shadows to-night
> Have struck more terror to the soul of Richard
> Than can the substance of ten thousand soldiers.[3]

Thus the play of *Richard the Third* exhibits, in its most pronounced form, Shakespeare's treatment of Wrong and Retribution. He has imagined for us an evil nature, set off to the eye by dis-

[1] V. iii. 177.
[2] So I interpret the words on waking, *The lights burn blue.*
[3] V. iii. 216.

torted shape, arising out of a past of historic turbulence, attaining, in the present play, a depth of moral degeneration in which villany is accepted as an ideal. Such ideal villany is projected into a universe which, in this one drama, is presented as a complex providential order every element of which is some varied phase of retribution.

III

INNOCENCE AND PATHOS: THE TRAGEDY OF *ROMEO AND JULIET*

In the preceding chapter we have been reviewing a drama the plot of which presents the universe as an elaborate system of retribution. In turning from this to other stories we are not to expect that in these the same aspect of the universe will be the one emphasised. I believe that no mistake has done more to distort Shakespeare criticism than the assumption on the part of so many commentators that retribution is an invariable principle. Their favourite maxims are that the deed returns upon the doer, that character determines fate. But these specious principles need careful examination. If the meaning be merely this, that the deed often returns upon the doer, that character is one of the forces determining fate, then these are profound truths. But if, as is usually the case, there is the suggestion that such maxims embody invariable laws — that the deed always returns upon the doer, that character and nothing but character determines the fate of individuals — then the principles are false; false alike to life itself and to the reflection of life in poetry.

To take a crucial illustration. The Cordelia of Shakespeare is recognised by all as a sweet and loving woman who devotes herself to save her father. In the sequel she is defeated, imprisoned, and cruelly hanged. Commentators who have assumed the invariability of nemesis feel bound to find in Cordelia's character some flaw which will justify such an ending to her career. They suggest that, however noble her aim, in the means employed she has sinned against patriotism, by calling in the French — natural enemies of England, we are to understand — to rescue Lear from his

evil daughters: this sin against patriotism must be atoned for by suffering and ignominy. I am persuaded that no one who comes to the play without a theory to support will so read the course of the story. There is not a single detail of Shakespeare's poem to which such a violation of patriotism can be attached; those in the story who are most patriotic are on Cordelia's side, and even Albany, whose office obliges him to resist the French invasion, complains that he cannot be valiant where his conscience is on the other side.[1] Cordelia no more sins against patriotism, in using the French army to resist the wicked queens, than the authors of the revolution of 1688 were unpatriotic, when they called in William of Orange to deliver England from King James. How then is the untoward fate of Cordelia to be explained? The plot of the play at this point is dominated, not by nemesis, but by another dramatic motive; it is not satisfying our sense of retribution, but exhibiting the *pathos* that unlocks the sympathy of the spectator, and sheds a beauty over suffering itself. Cordelia has devoted herself to her father: fate mysteriously seconds her devotion, and leaves out nothing, not even her life, to make the sacrifice complete.

It is obvious that to approach dramas with some antecedent assumption as to principles invariably to be found in them is a violation of the inductive criticism attempted in this work, which frankly accepts the details of a poem as they stand in order to evolve from these alone the underlying principles. But I would for the moment waive this point in order to ask, What authority have we for the assumption itself that retribution is an invariable principle of providential government? In the drama of antiquity, as all will concede, no such principle holds; Greek tragedy is never so tragic as where it exhibits the good man crushed by external force of Destiny. But the contention is often made that all this has been changed by modern religion, not any particular theological system, but the whole spirit of modern religion, of which the Bible is the embodiment; that this has introduced such conceptions of God and of man that Shakespeare and other

[1] *Lear:* V. i. 23.

modern poets cannot give us a sense of poetic satisfaction unless their dramatic world presents a providence wholly of retribution, under which men face no power determining their individual fates other than the destiny they have made by their individual characters. To me it seems extraordinary that any such contention should have been put forward in the name of biblical religion. Not to mention other objections, such a plea flies in the face of what, from the literary point of view, is the most impressive portion of the Bible itself — the *Book of Job*. Here we have a hero, whom God himself accepts as perfect and upright, overwhelmed by waves of calamity reducing him to penury and excruciating him with disease. Men gather together to discuss the strange event. The three Friends of Job take up exactly the position I am here impugning — the invariable connection of suffering with sin, so that the calamities of Job are proof positive of some unknown guilt. Job tears their argument to tatters; in the excitement of debate he seems to recognise the impunity of the sinner as a principle of providential government not less prominent than the principle of retribution. Who is to decide between these opposite views? In the epilogue to *Job* God is represented as declaring that the three Friends have not said the thing that is right, as Job has. And all the while the reader of the *Book of Job* has known — from the opening story — that the calamities were sent from heaven upon Job for reasons connected with his righteousness, and not with his sin. Thus the biblical *Book of Job* is the strongest of all pronouncements against the invariability of retribution, the strongest of all assertions that, besides this, other principles are recognised in the providential government of the universe.

The attempt to analyse all experience in terms of retribution is false alike to real life and to life in the ideal. In the real life about us a little child dies: how in this experience has character determined fate? Not the character of the child, for there has been no responsibility. There may be cases in which the death of a child is retribution upon the carelessness or folly of parents; but will any one contend that this is always so? Yet the experience is

not meaningless: there is a certain beauty as we contemplate the child life consummated in its own simplicity, before the weight of coming maturity has effaced a single lineament of childhood's own special grace. Nemesis has no application, but there is room for pathos.

It is however zeal for the idealising of life that has given strength to the contention that in poetry at all events character alone must determine fate. But, in the spirit of the *Book of Job*, we may make bold to say that such invariability of retribution lowers the conception of human life; the world becomes not less but more ideal where the providential system of government gives room for principles other than retributive. Moral elevation implies moral choice. But if the connection between character and fate were immutable — if righteousness necessarily and inevitably brought reward, and guilt necessarily and inevitably ended in ruin — then in so mechanical a life men would be forever choosing between prosperity and adversity, while there would be no opportunity for the higher choice between right and wrong. In *Job*, the Council in Heaven recognises that the unbroken prosperity of the patriarch has made it impossible to say whether his life is a life of true piety or of interested policy;[1] it is only when unmerited calamities have overwhelmed him that Job can reveal his higher self with the cry, "Though he slay me, I will trust him." The three children of the *Book of Daniel*, confronting cruel persecution, believe indeed that their God can deliver them from the tyrant; but we feel them as rising to a higher moral plane when they go on to face the other alternative, "*But if not*, we will not bow down."[2] It is the exceptions to the universality of retribution that make the free atmosphere in which alone the highest morality can develop.

Whether therefore we consider real life or life in the ideal, whether we review ancient tragedy or the literature of the Bible, we are led to the conclusion that a moral system revealed in dramatic plot must be expected to exhibit nemesis as a single aspect of providence, and not as its sole law. Now one of the

[1] *Job* i. 9–10. [2] *Daniel* iii. 17–18.

principles underlying the exceptions to the universality of retribution, one of the forces that will be found to come between individual character and individual fate, is that which is expressed by the term Accident. I know that to many of my readers this word will be a stumblingblock; those especially who are new to ethical studies are apt to consider that their philosophical reputation will be compromised if they consent to recognise the possibility of accidents. But such a feeling rests upon a confusion between physics and morals. In the physical world, which is founded upon universality and the sum of things, we make it a preliminary axiom that every event has a cause, known or yet to be discovered. But in the world of morals, where individual responsibility comes in, it is obvious that events must happen to individuals the causes of which are outside individual control. To take the simplest example. A number of persons, in the ordinary course of their daily life, enter a railway train; the train goes over an embankment into a river, and fifty of the occupants meet a violent and painful death. We call this, rightly, a 'railway accident.' It is true that, so far as the incident is a part of the physical world, there have been ample causes for all the effects: there has been careless service, or undermining waters, and gravitation has done its proper work. But in the moral world of each individual who has thus perished there has been no causation; nothing these persons have done has caused the disaster, nothing left undone by them would have averted it; in the universe of their individual lives the incident remains an effect without a cause. A deed has here returned upon others than the doer; whatever we may call it in physics, the event must be pronounced a moral accident.

The moral system of Shakespeare gives full recognition to accident as well as retribution; the interest of plot at one point is the moral satisfaction of nemesis, where we watch the sinner found out by his sin; it changes at another point to the not less moral sensation of pathos, our sympathy going out to the suffering which is independent of wrong doing. A notable illustration of the latter is the tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet.* In this play Shakespeare

engages our sympathies for two young and attractive lives, and proceeds to bring down upon them wave after wave of calamity, which come upon them not as the result of what Romeo and Juliet have done, but from accident and circumstances not within their control. Instead of wrong and retribution, we have in this case innocence and pathos. Here however a misconception must be avoided. To say that Romeo and Juliet are innocent is not the same thing as to say that they are perfect. No one cares to discuss whether these young souls had not their full share of original sin; nor is it relevant to inquire whether two different persons in their situation might or might not have acted differently. The essential point is that in the providential dispensations of Shakespeare's story, the tragedy overwhelming the lovers is brought about, not by error on their part, but by circumstances outside their control, by what is to them external accident.

It is convenient to divide the course of the story into three stages: there is the original entanglement of the secret marriage; there is the accession of entanglement in the banishment of Romeo; and there is the final tragedy of the fifth act. In each case we are to see the essential events happening, not through the sin or error of the hero or heroine, but through forces outside their personal will.

It is, I suppose, an impertinence for grave analysis to pry into the merry mystery of boy and girl love; otherwise, I would remark that the mode in which Romeo and Juliet become attached to one another brings us close to the domain of the accidental. Some men walk into love with their eyes open, looking to the right and to the left, and above all looking behind to see that their retreat is open to the last moment. Others glide into love, yielding half consciously to an attraction as fundamental as gravitation. Yet others, by their phrase 'falling in love,' recognise suddenness and shock; an even higher degree of suddenness and shock is found in the social phenomenon of 'love at first sight.' Of course such love at first sight may, in some cases, be no more than the quickening, under favourable surroundings, of what would under other

circumstances have come about more gradually. But what are we to say of the cases where the shock of a momentary meeting has *reversed* for two human beings the whole direction in which each of the lives has been tending?

In the natural course of events Romeo and Juliet would never have met: they belong to families bitterly at feud, and Romeo, moreover, is in love with a Rosaline, whose unrequiting coldness drives him to desperation. Accident must intervene in order to bring the two even to physical proximity. The Capulets are giving a dance, and the head of the house hands his servant a list of guests to be invited. The man does not tell his master that he cannot read writing, but, outside the house, must ask the first persons he meets to decipher the paper for him. By accident,[1] the first persons he meets are a party of Montagues, Romeo amongst them; the name of Rosaline among those invited leads Romeo to accept a suggestion of a surprise mask. Yet at the door of the Capulet house — so does our story quiver with the accidental — Romeo is all but backing out; his heart is too heavy with Rosaline's unkindness for his heels to make merry; at last he goes forward for comradeship sake. Once inside, he is found risking his life to inquire whose is the beauty that has smitten him.[2]

> O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright!
> It seems she hangs upon the cheeks of night
> Like a rich jewel in an Ethiope's ear.

Juliet at first has not seen Romeo under his mask; the moment he has accosted her, her words speak the shock of helpless passion.[3]

> If he be married,
> My grave is like to be my wedding bed.

An instant's encounter has reversed the whole current of two lives; Juliet's words emphasise this sudden reversal.[4]

[1] I. ii. 34–106; compare I. iv.
[2] I. v. 47.
[3] I. v. 136.
[4] I. v. 140.

My only love sprung from my only hate!
Too early seen unknown, and known too late!
Prodigious birth of love it is to me,
That I must love a loathed enemy.

Is it overstraining to say that such reciprocal passion has come as an external shock into each separate life? Suppose the story had been so ordered that, at this ball of the Capulets, a thunderstorm had intervened, and Romeo and Juliet by two successive flashes had been instantly killed: would not every commentator have recognised a story of most remarkable accident, in spite of the existence of a science of electricity? Not less accidental than such lightning strokes has come the encounter which, in an instant affording no room for choice, has changed Romeo and Juliet from loathed hereditary foes into passionate lovers for life.

But love is one thing, marriage another; it may be urged that, while Romeo and Juliet have without their consent been caught in the toils of passion, yet moral responsibility comes in with the further question, whether they shall yield to the passion or resist. We have to ask then, what just cause or impediment there is why these two lovers should not marry. Is it the impediment of parental objection? It might be a delicate matter to inquire how far parental opposition is a final barrier to the marriage of children; fortunately, Shakespeare has so moulded his story that this difficult question is entirely eliminated. The Montague's voice is recognised, and an attempt made to eject him from the Capulet house; the head of the house forbids this infraction of hospitable honour, and in the altercation[1] Juliet's father speaks thus of Romeo:

He bears him like a portly gentleman;
And, to say truth, Verona brags of him
To be a virtuous and well govern'd youth.

No higher testimonial could be given by any father to the worthiness of a suitor for his daughter's hand. It appears then that the

[1] I. v. 56–90.

barrier to the union of the lovers is not parental authority, but the unrighteous feud. And that this is a true reading of the situation we may call for confirmation a witness from the story itself. The Friar is not only a man of the highest character, but (according to the religious ideas of the time) the keeper of the consciences of Montagues and Capulets alike. That he understands the union of Romeo and Juliet to be barred by no impediment but that of the feud Father Laurence shows by his consenting secretly to perform the wedding ceremony; and he does it on the highest grounds, in the hope that the union of the children may come to heal the feud of the parents.[1]

Thus the first stage of the story is complete. A marriage that must be hushed up may indeed be called a moral entanglement. But in the present case it has been brought about by no error on the part of Romeo and Juliet; its secrecy is the necessary result of a situation of affairs for which they are in no way responsible.

There is an accession of entanglement when, after the secret marriage has been consummated, the husband is banished. Careless readers of the play have spoken of Romeo as banished for duelling. Nothing could be more unjust; it would be nearer the truth to say that he is driven into exile for an attempt at peacemaking.

This section of the story brings to the front two special personalities. Mercutio is unconnected with the two warring factions, and is kinsman to the prince. He is clearly a leading figure in Verona society. He appears to be a man of exuberant vitality; brimming over with riotous fancies, speaking "more in a minute than he will stand to in a month"; restless for the cut and thrust of wit, and the cut and thrust with weapon. His irrepressible activity is kept within bounds of good humour — with one exception: he has a chronic contempt for one who seems his artificial anti-type, Tybalt, who takes current slang for wit, and makes duelling an end in itself.

[1] II. iii. 90.

> O, he is the courageous captain of complements. He fights as you sing prick-song, keeps time, distance, and proportion; rests me his minim rest, one, two, and the third in your bosom: the very butcher of a silk button, a duellist, a duellist; a gentleman of the very first house, of the first and second cause: ah, the immortal passado! the pauto reverso! the hai! . . . The pox of such antic, lisping, affecting fantasticoes; these new tuners of accents![1]

Mercutio and Tybalt, with lesser persons, make up an atmosphere of social recklessness, which enables us to measure how much of moral resistance there is when Romeo refuses a challenge. The circumstances are these. Tybalt, restrained from turning Romeo out of Capulet's house, is the next day roaming over the city to seek him: Mercutio has met Tybalt and is holding him in check.[2] By perverse fortune, at this moment Romeo comes upon them; Tybalt glides from Mercutio's sword point to accost the Montague, and hurls at him in public the word 'villain.' But the husband of Juliet holds down his anger, and gives a dignified answer. Mercutio is shocked that a gentleman wearing a sword should not have drawn in a moment to avenge an insult; yet, good-humouredly, Mercutio with his ready weapon forces Tybalt to encounter with himself instead of Romeo. At once Romeo calls upon the bystanders to separate the two: he and Benvolio strike down the weapons of the combatants. Thereupon Tybalt by "an envious thrust" under the arm of Romeo gives a mortal wound to Mercutio. Romeo has seen a friend, interfering to save him, murdered[3] before his eyes; he sees Tybalt furious for more blood and in triumph. Then he does draw his sword; he is unhappily too successful; Tybalt falls, and Romeo is subject to the doom of banishment.

In what has our hero done wrong? It is true that our wiser

[1] II. iv. 19. [2] III. i. 38, and whole scene.

[3] The word is justified by a comparison of III. i. 173 with line 108 of the same scene, and the stage direction at line 94. Compare also Romeo's words in lines 114–6.

modern life has provided for such a contingency by its institution of the police. But, when we are dealing with general conceptions of right and wrong, it is to be remembered that moral indignation is part of the whole duty of man. The prince who condemns Romeo accepts the description of his offence as no more than "concluding but what the law should end, the life of Tybalt."[1] Romeo is banished, not on account of the quality of his act, but because of the arbitrary decree against street fighting drawn from the prince by feuds of Montague and Capulet. This second stage of the entanglement may be thus summed up: accident has brought Romeo into a situation, in which his self-restraint, and attempt at peacemaking, have subjected him to a doom instituted on account of that factious violence which Romeo has just been resisting.

The final phase of the movement is ushered in by the suit of Count Paris for the hand of Juliet. The offer is at once accepted by her father, and — such is the strange entanglement of events — the death of Tybalt has made it possible for Capulet to dispense with ceremony, and appoint a quiet wedding for a date within the week of the proposal.[2] There is no time to concert measures with Romeo. What is Juliet to do? Will it be suggested that she might confess all to her parents, relying on the fact that a marriage is a thing which cannot be undone? But we must remember the type of parent in the case. When Juliet shows the first sign of resistance to the idea of wedding within a day or two a man who has never asked her for her love, her mother in a moment takes fire, and the father no less quickly catches the heat.[3]

Capulet. Soft! take me with you, take me with you, wife.
How! will she none? doth she not give us thanks?
Is she not proud?

Juliet's answer is a model of respect tempering firmness:

Juliet. Proud can I never be of what I hate;
But thankful even for hate, that is meant love.

[1] III. i. 191. [2] III. iv. 23. [3] III. v. 37, and whole scene.

The father's temper explodes.

Capulet. Thank me no thankings, nor proud me no prouds,
But fettle your fine joints 'gainst Thursday next,
To go with Paris to Saint Peter's Church,
Or I will drag thee on a hurdle thither. —

Foul language follows, until even Lady Capulet and the Nurse have to interpose. Is confidence possible with parents like these? Lady Capulet was for having Romeo poisoned over in Mantua, merely on account of Tybalt's death;[1] had it become known that a union with that hated Montague stood between Juliet and a great match, would Romeo's life have been worth an hour's purchase?

Juliet sees no escape from the entanglement but death. She is ready to die, but, with pious self-control, seeks the sanction of the Church. This brings out the Friar's magnificent scheme. Friar Laurence is not only a strong, calm soul in the midst of a world of the passionate; not only a leading ecclesiastic of the city with Capulets and Montagues alike for his penitents; he further represents the mystic science of the primitive time, and knows how, by herbal draughts he can compound, to reduce vigorous youth to the appearance of a corpse ready for the sepulchre, draughts compounded with such precision that at the end of two and forty hours Juliet shall awake as from pleasant sleep to perfect health. And the daring experiment fulfils itself to the exact minute.[2]

But if we admire the scheme of the Friar, what shall we say of the heroism of Juliet who carries it out? Unlike the patient of real life, whom nature prepares by wasting pain for a welcome release, Juliet must in full flush of strong life go through the bitterness of death.[3] She bids an ordinary 'Good Night' to her mother and nurse, and in low whisper adds:

God knows when we shall meet again.

[1] III. v. 89.

[2] IV. i. 105, and whole speech; compare V. iii. 257, and whole speech.

[3] Compare the whole scene: IV. iii. The abrupt transitions of thought in Juliet's soliloquy must be carefully studied, as indications of changes in the scene she imagines.

She finds herself — perhaps for the first time in her young life — alone at night; she can hardly restrain herself from calling the nurse back. But the dread deed needs solitude. Juliet draws from its secret place the Friar's gift, and marks the transparent phial with its colourless liquid; innocent looking as water, can it, she wonders, produce such strange effects, and will she not awake with morning, to be dragged to the altar? That at least must never be; and Juliet, taking some stiletto-like ornament of a girl's dress, lays it ready, a last resort by which she will be faithful to her marriage vow. She looks at the phial again, and the opposite thought strikes her: what if it is poison? The idea gains probability; none but the Friar and herself know of the secret marriage, and if she were out of the way — but she checks herself, and knows the Friar for a holy man. At last the phial is uncorked, and Juliet catches a whiff of strange odour. Scientists have noted that nothing is more powerful in exciting trains of mental association than the sense of smell. As the sickly fumes pervade the atmosphere of the chamber Juliet's brain begins to take fire. She catches the awful thought of awaking too soon; she realises the strangling sensation of the stifling vault, all the terrors of the tomb around her, the unearthly shrieks from which passers-by will flee in horror; she fancies herself unable to move without disturbing the dust of dead ancestors, ready to dash her brains out with what comes nearest and finding this the bone of some forefather. Not ancestors alone; her quickened mind play recollects Tybalt newly borne to the family vault; she seems to see the white shroud, and horrible curiosity would peer through to the festering corpse beneath. But the tumult of imaginative associations is working itself out to the natural climax of a Romeo approaching to the rescue. At this point the trains of association clash: the white shroud seems to rise, as Tybalt seeks the man who spitted him upon his rapier's point. Wildly Juliet essays to save her lover, and feels herself held back by some strong bar; in vague confusion she leaps to the thought that life is the bar holding her from this scene of the sepulchre, and that the phial is the way of escape.

Stay, Tybalt, stay!
Romeo, I come! this do I drink to thee.

She puts the phial to her lips, and falls insensible.

The magnificent scheme of the Friar, the heroism of Juliet in executing it, all is rendered useless by the accidental detention of Friar John.[1] This is the hinge of accident on which the whole issue turns. As part of Friar Laurence's scheme, a messenger must apprise Romeo of what is being done. The careful messenger knows that travellers may miscarry, and Friar John seeks another friar of his order to accompany him for greater security. They are starting, when the door of the house is suddenly barred by the searchers of the town; the house is declared infected by the plague, and none may leave it. The messenger is helpless, and meanwhile the false news[2] is borne to Romeo. His view of life is not ours; long before this Romeo had announced his simple creed:

Do thou but close our hands with holy words:
Then love-devouring death do what he dare;
It is enough I may but call her mine.[3]

With the news of Juliet's death there is nothing left in life for Romeo. The Apothecary — evil counterpart to the Friar, with mystic drugs that kill instead of mystic drugs that heal — finds the means. Romeo hastens to the sepulchre of the Capulets to join his love in her death.

It is night,[4] that which was to have been the bridal night of Paris; he has come with floral offerings to the tomb of the Capulets. The pious obsequies are interrupted, and a torch is seen cleaving the dark: some cursed robber or insulter of the dead, Paris thinks. The thought is confirmed as Romeo, dismissing his page, seeks to put him on a false scent, and speaks of descending to the bed of death and taking a precious ring from a dead finger. Paris can see the figure advance, the torch planted in the ground,

[1] V. ii. 5; compare V. iii. 251.
[2] V. i. 1.
[3] II. vi. 6.
[4] V. iii, whole scene.

the mattock raised against the very sepulchre of Juliet; more than this, he recognises the face of a Montague. He leaps from his concealment to arrest the felon in the act. It is in vain that Romeo seeks to restrain him, and bids him not tempt a desperate man: by the flickering torchlight swords cross, and again Romeo's sword is unhappily successful; Paris lies bleeding to death, with his last breath begging to be laid in the tomb with Juliet. Then Romeo recalls dim recollections of another suitor; he obeys the dying request, and taking up the body he bears it into the sepulchre. But lo! he seems to see, not a sepulchre, rather a glorious lantern[1] lit up with the loveliness of Juliet. Romeo had been steeling his heart to endure the dread sight of death's defacement; on the contrary, what he finds is fulness of the beauty he loves so well. For the forty-two hours are almost expired, and the returning tide of health is nearing its flood point; the pallor of death has passed away, and beauty's ensign is crimson in lips and cheek. Romeo hangs over the body enamoured; the wonder fills him that death himself should turn amorous, and keep Juliet in the dark grave as his paramour. Each moment the returning tide of life is gathering fulness: the eyelids are lying as light as snowflakes on the longed-for eyes; the lips seem as if at any moment they might part and let the fragrant breath come through. The agony of love is more than Romeo can bear, and there is but one way to possess all this beauty.

> O true apothecary!
> Thy drugs are quick. Thus with a kiss I die.

Then the forty-two hours have expired; the returning tide of life has reached its flood point. As with a dreamer on the verge of waking, Juliet's consciousness is of some place where she ought to be, and that she is there; sound of approaching footsteps and a familiar voice strengthen the impression; she opens her eyes, and all is true.

> O comfortable friar! where is my lord?

[1] Romeo's own word: V. iii. 84.

A moment later she has taken in the whole scene. In vain the Friar seeks to get her away, for the watch is heard approaching. Juliet can only feel bitterly that her lover has left her behind.

> O churl! drunk all, and left no friendly drop
> To help me after?

But there is his dagger, and with this she can find a way of following. So the three lie side by side, — Paris, Romeo, Juliet, — and the triple tragedy has all been brought about by that accidental detention of Friar John.

The plot of this play has fully unfolded itself; what has been its dominant motive? In the dim background of the story, for those who care to look for it, may be seen a providence of retribution: evil has brought forth evil, where the feud of the parents has caused the death of the children. This retribution is seen balanced by its opposite, for the heroism of Juliet is a good that but brings forth evil. But in the foreground, at every turn of the movement, we see emphasised the strange work of providence by which accident mocks the best concerted schemes of man; pity, not terror, is the emotion of the poem. It is accident which has brought Romeo and Juliet together, and they have loved without sin; accident has converted Romeo's self-restraint into the entanglement of exile from his bride; the smallest of accidents has been sufficient to turn deep wisdom and devoted heroism into a tragedy that engulfs three innocent lives.

There are certain passages of the play into which have been read suggestions of folly and its penalty, but which in truth are entirely in tune with the prevailing impression of irresistible circumstance. When Juliet says[1] —

> I have no joy of this contract to-night:
> It is too rash, too unadvised, too sudden;
> Too like the lightning, which doth cease to be
> Ere one can say, 'It lightens': —

[1] II. ii. 117.

and Romeo answers —

> I am afeard,
> Being in night, all this is but a dream,
> Too flattering-sweet to be substantial: —

the two are not making confession of faulty rashness: it is only the common thought of new-born love, that it is too good to be true. Similarly, when the Friar says to Romeo[1] —

> These violent delights have violent ends . . .
> Therefore love moderately; —

he is not blaming, but fearing: his own action shows that this is the sense. The Friar justly rebukes the desperate fury of Romeo at the sentence of banishment;[2] but this fault of Romeo does not affect the movement of events, for he does not act upon his fury, but on the contrary lays it aside, and submits to the counsel of his spiritual adviser — the counsel which eventually turns to his ruin.

On the other hand, it may be said that in this more than in any other play Shakespeare comes near to being a commentator on himself, and to giving us his own authority for the true interpretation. In the prologue it is the author who speaks: this opening of the plot exhibits, not sin and its consequences, but a suggestion of entangling circumstance; when he speaks of the "fatal loins" of the parents, the "star-cross'd lovers," and their "misadventured piteous overthrows," Shakespeare is using the language of destiny and pathos. For what is spoken in the scenes the speakers alone are responsible; yet a succession of striking passages has the effect of carrying on the suggestion of the prologue — dramatic foreshadowings, unconscious finger-pointings to the final tragedy, just like the shocks of omen that in ancient drama brought out the irony of fate. Romeo on the threshold of the Capulet mansion has such a foreshadowing.

> My mind misgives
> Some consequence, yet hanging in the stars,
> Shall bitterly begin his fearful date
> With this night's revels, and expire the term

[1] II. vi. 9. [2] III. iii, from 24.

Of a despised life closed in my breast
By some vile forfeit of untimely death.
But He, that hath the steerage of my course,
Direct my sail![1]

The feeling recurs just as the encounter with swords is entering its last phase.

This day's black fate on more days doth depend.[2]

A shock of ill-omen visits Juliet, as she watches Romeo descend the rope ladder to go into exile.

O God! I have an ill-divining soul!
Methinks I see thee, now thou art below,
As one dead in the bottom of a tomb.[3]

In ominous phrase Lady Capulet's petulance expresses itself when her daughter resists the suit of Paris:

I would the fool were married to her grave![4]

Strangely ironic is the language in which Juliet begs for time.

Delay this marriage for a month, a week;
Or, if you do not, make the bridal bed
In that dim monument where Tybalt lies.[5]

And there is both irony and weird omen in the unnatural elation with which Romeo is awaiting the messenger of doom:

My dreams presage some joyful news at hand . . .
I dreamt my lady came and found me dead —
Strange dream, that gives a dead man leave to think! —
And breathed such life with kisses in my lips,
That I revived, and was an emperor.[6]

In passages like these Destiny itself seems to be speaking through the lips of the dramatis personæ. In their more ordinary speech the personages of the play reiterate the one idea of fortune and

[1] I. iv. 106.
[2] III. i. 124.
[3] III. v. 54.
[4] III. v. 141.
[5] III. v. 202.
[6] V. i. 1.

fate. Romeo after the fall of Tybalt feels that he is "fortune's fool."[1] The Friar takes the same view:[2]

> Romeo, come forth; come forth, thou fearful man:
> Affliction is enamour'd of thy parts,
> And thou art wedded to calamity:

he sees in the banished husband a prodigy of ill luck,[3] misfortune has fallen in love with him. Juliet feels the same burden of hostile fate:

> Alack, alack, that heaven should practice stratagems
> Upon so soft a subject as myself![4]

Romeo recognises the slain Paris as "one writ with me in sour misfortune's book"; his last fatal act is a struggle "to shake the yoke of inauspicious stars from this world-wearied flesh."[5] The wisdom of the Friar receives the detention of the messenger as "unhappy fortune"; in the final issue of events he tremblingly feels how "an unkind hour is guilty of this lamentable chance," how "a greater power than we can contradict hath thwarted our intents."[6] The note struck by the prologue rings in the final couplet of the poem: no moral lesson is read, but the word pathos is found in its simple English equivalent —

> For never was a story of more WOE
> Than this of Juliet and her Romeo.

[1] III. i. 141. [2] III. iii. 1.

[3] Many commentators, and even Schmidt's Lexicon, understand *fearful* as *timid*. But the context seems decisive for the other sense — *terrible to contemplate*.

[4] III. v. 211. [5] V. iii. 82, 111.

[6] V. ii. 17; V. iii. 145; V. iii. 153.

IV

WRONG AND RESTORATION: THE COMEDIES OF *WINTER'S TALE* AND *CYMBELINE*

THE present work treats dramatic plot as a revelation of moral providence; the successive plays are microcosms, and some aspect of the universe appears for each as a binding force in which the many-sided characters and incidents find their harmony. In one play we have thus seen innocence and pathos, in another wrong and retribution. But the evil of life admits of yet another treatment: wrong may find its restoration. Redemption, the profoundest of moral principles, is also an ideal of the poet. But poetry is not the same thing as theology. Its mission is not to unfold a plan of salvation; but it gives recognition to the work of restoration in human life, and clothes this with artistic beauty, especially giving to it those touches of balance and symmetry which make up so large a part of poetical idealisation. Two dramas suggest themselves as special studies of Wrong and Restoration — *Winter's Tale* and *Cymbeline*. To the analyst the two have much in common. In the bare anatomy of plot the plays are bound together by their sixfold basis of structure; in each Shakespeare has borrowed from ancient literature the device of the oracle, not an external force governing events, but the emphasis by supernatural revelation of a result otherwise accomplished. The very difference of the two poems gives the link of contrast. *Winter's Tale* presents wrong and restoration in the simplest form; in *Cymbeline* similar elements of story are seen highly elaborated into what is perhaps the most complex of Shakespearean dramas.

In *Winter's Tale* the whole wrong is comprehended in the passion of Leontes. Not only is this a single thing, but — to do

it justice — in the scale of guilt we must rank it low. There are wrongs which are infinitely bad when looked at in themselves, but which impress us differently if we consider them as revelations of the wrong-doer. This is especially true of jealousy. In another of Shakespeare's plays we have two notable types of this passion side by side: Iago's jealousy is the natural outcome of a nature wholly depraved; on the other hand, it is the transparent guilelessness of Othello that makes it possible for Iago to work him up to his frenzy of suspicion. The jealousy of Leontes is of this latter type. If we inquire as to the general character of the Sicilian King, apart from the one crisis of his life, three powerful witnesses speak for its depth and truth. The tale tells of an ideal friendship, like the friendship of David and Jonathan, or Damon and Pythias: such friendships can subsist only between true natures. In the same direction point the wifely devotion of so high-souled a wife as Hermione, and the passionate attachment of the counsellor who in the past has had the close intercourse of confidential adviser, an attachment bringing Camillo back to Sicily after injury and years of exile.[1] The outburst of jealousy in the play is not villany, but moral disease; it is a fever fit, and moral fevers, like physical, make the greatest ravages in the strongest constitutions. It is noticeable that the person of the play who has the best opportunity for observing Leontes uses the language of disease. At the first symptom of the King's morbid imagination Camillo cries:

> Good my lord, be cured
> Of this diseased opinion, and betimes;
> For 'tis most dangerous.[2]

When Camillo feels the case hopeless, and has to open the matter to Polixenes his speech is similar:

> There is a sickness
> Which puts some of us in distemper, but
> I cannot name the disease; and it is caught
> Of you that yet are well.[3]

[1] IV. ii. 1–32; IV. iv, from 519. [2] I. ii. 296. [3] I. ii. 384.

Polixenes thinks of using reason to his friend; Camillo knows better.

> Swear his thought over
> By each particular star in heaven and
> By all their influences, you may as well
> Forbid the sea for to obey the moon,
> As or by oath remove or counsel shake
> The fabric of his folly.[1]

Of course, we are responsible for our moral, as for our physical, health. The sin of Leontes has been the unguarded heart which has allowed jealousy to enter. But once the morbid passion has passed beyond a certain point, it is as vain to denounce the further outrages of Leontes as it would be to parse the ravings of delirium.

The origin of the wrong is outside the field of view; Bohemia's long visit has been a period of incubation for the poison germs, and the first we see of Leontes is as when by the stethoscope a heart disease has suddenly been revealed in an advanced stage. At the beginning of the scene[2] Leontes is still struggling against what he feels to be unworthy; like the honourable man he is, he makes such suspicions a reason for urging a longer visit; nay, he calls upon his queen to second the invitation. But when the responsive eloquence of Hermione has proved successful, the bitterness of the husband's heart comes to the surface in words:

> *Leont.* At my request he would not.

Leontes recovers himself, and turns to his wife with the most graceful of speeches.

> *Leont.* Hermione, my dearest, thou never spokest
> To better purpose.
> *Her.* Never?
> *Leont.* Never, but once . . . when
> Three crabbed months had sour'd themselves to death
> Ere I could make thee open thy white hand,
> And clap thyself my love.

[1] I. ii. 424. [2] I. ii.

But the effort is too much for Leontes:[1] he has tremor cordis, his heart dances but not for joy. He must turn aside and play with his little son. Yet he can reason[2] with his 'affection' — the Shakespearean word for 'passion':

> With what's unreal thou coactive art,
> And fellow'st nothing —

but this restraining thought suggests its opposite:

> then 'tis very credent
> Thou mayst co-join with something; and thou dost.

The King would be alone, and bids the Queen take charge of her guest.

> I am angling now,
> Though you perceive me not how I give line.

The passion of jealousy, indulged, now rushes with full flood.[3]

> Go, play, boy, play: thy mother plays, and I
> Play too; but so disgraced a part, whose issue
> Will hiss me to my grave.

We can see clearly the psychology of jealousy in such cases as Leontes and Othello: the thing imagined is so abhorrent to a pure soul, that the very shame of it inflames the imagination, and suspicions become realities too strong for the discrimination of judgment. Leontes no longer hesitates to confide his thought to the clear-sighted Camillo; the thought now spoken in all its details, for the purpose of convincing the horrified friend, convinces beyond recovery the diseased thinker.[4] Camillo sees that he must affect to enter into the plot against Polixenes in order to save him. Of course, when the two have fled from Sicily, this comes as full confirmation; all that is seen around Leontes is one great conspiracy.[5] It is in vain that the King is encountered by the injured innocence of the stately Hermione, by the blank

[1] I. ii, from 108.
[2] I. ii. 138–46.
[3] I. ii. 187.
[4] I. ii, from 267.
[5] II. i. 47, and whole scene.

amazement of the courtiers, which Antigonus expresses with a blunt force that makes its coarseness pardonable: jealousy is a flame that converts obstacles into fresh fuel, and to Leontes the lords are so many blind fools, the queen's guilt has put on its natural hypocrisy.[1] The little son's illness is announced: it becomes fresh evidence.

> To see his nobleness!
> Conceiving the dishonour of his mother,
> He straight declined.[2]

The new-born infant is laid before the King —

> . . . the whole matter
> And copy of the father, eye, nose, lip,
> The trick of 's frown, his forehead, nay, the valley,
> The pretty dimples of his chin and cheek; his smiles:
> The very mould and frame of hand, nail, finger[3] —

but all this hardens the morbid heart, and Leontes cries to commit the brat and its adulterous dam to the flames. All this while Leontes is conscious of honesty and justice. His second thought of having the babe carried by Antigonus to some lonely spot in Bohemia, "some place when chance may nurse or end it," is meant by the King, and understood by the court, as an appeal to providence.[4] And — to convince others, not himself — the King has sent to the infallible oracle:[5]

> Let us be clear'd
> Of being tyrannous, since we so openly
> Proceed in justice, which shall have due course,
> Even to the guilt or the purgation.

But when the thunderbolt of the oracle falls,[6] even this cannot stop the headlong course of jealous frenzy:

> There is no truth at all i' the oracle:
> The sessions shall proceed.

[1] II. i, from 126. [2] II. iii. 12. [3] II. iii. 98, and whole scene.
[4] II. iii, from 154; compare line 183, and III. iii. 41–6.
[5] II. i. 180, 189; III. ii. 4. [6] III. ii, from 133.

The fever has reached the full crisis, when a shock must kill or cure. The shock comes in the announcement, at that very instant, of the boy's death.

> Apollo's angry; and the heavens themselves
> Do strike at my injustice.

The shock repeats itself: for the news seems mortal to the fainting queen. Leontes has in a moment recovered his full sanity: but it is the crushed helplessness that succeeds when the fever crisis has passed.

> Thou canst not speak too much; I have deserved
> All tongues to talk their bitterest. . . . Prithee, bring me
> To the dead bodies of my queen and son:
> One grave shall be for both; upon them shall
> The causes of their death appear, unto
> Our shame perpetual. Once a day I'll visit
> The chapel where they lie, and tears shed there
> Shall be my recreation: so long as nature
> Will bear up with this exercise, so long
> I daily vow to use it.

The oracle thus brought to the trial of the queen is the motive centre of the play, in which all the lines of plot meet.[1]

> Hermione is chaste;
> Polixenes blameless;
> Camillo a true subject;
> Leontes a jealous tyrant;
> His innocent babe truly begotten;
> And the king shall live without an heir,
> If that which is lost be not found.

The first part of the oracle, clear as a flash of lightning, has laid bare at a single stroke the whole wrong of Leontes. It is a sixfold woe he has incurred. He has lost the wife he adores; he has lost the friend of his bosom; he has lost his pretty son and

[1] See below, Appendix, page 350.

his new-born daughter; he has lost the minister Camillo, with whom he had taken lifelong counsel: and he has lost the loyal servant, Antigonus, who so unwillingly has gone to execute a cruel doom. But in its latter clauses the oracle is the dim revelation, which can be read only by the light of fulfilment. Latent in its mystic phrase is the sixfold restoration: the wife is to be received as from the tomb, the friend to be again embraced in Sicilia; the lost babe will reappear a lovely daughter; the lost son will be replaced by a son-in-law who is the image of Polixenes as known in his youth. Camillo will return, unable to live without his king; and if Antigonus himself has been caught in the doom of which he is minister, it is his widow, the faithful Paulina, to whom has been committed the chief ministry of restoration.

The play divides at its centre: the work of wrong is balanced by the working out of restoration. An interval of time, indicated by a chorus, allows the babe to grow up into a girl of sixteen; the scene shifts from Sicilia to Bohemia. But these are small points in comparison with the total change of spirit which the great master of plot suddenly brings over his drama: in a moment we find ourselves in a new world. A change from verse to prose appropriately ushers in the passage from high life, with grand passions and court intrigues, to the remote recesses of the country, and the rude pastoral manners in which poetry has always sought its golden age. It is a region of homely shepherds and their still more clownish sons; with storms when you cannot thrust a bodkin's point betwixt sea and sky, or sunny days in the sweet of the year, that set the red blood in winter's pale, while the thrush and jay, or lark with tirra-lyra chant, make summer songs. It is a life of naïve simplicity; its cares are to follow grumblingly the scared sheep, when some "boiled brains of nineteen and two-and-twenty" insist on hunting in bad weather; or to cast up items of groceries for the feast, not without the aid of counters. For great events we hear of sheep-shearing times and their busy hospitality: with the old wife as both dame and servant, welcoming all, serving all, "her face o' fire with labour and the thing she took to quench it";

with Mopsa and Dorcas dancing, or watching the gallimaufry of gambols some newly come Satyrs are exhibiting, one of whom, by his own report, has danced before the King, while the worst "jumps twelve foot and a half by the squier"; with disguised royalties invited in as passers-by, and listening to the songs, or the catches of the three-man song-men, or the puritan singing psalms to hornpipes. The poetry of this life is the language of flowers: how for the reverend visitors there are rosemary and rue, which keep seeming and savour all the winter long; how for middle life there are summer growths of hot lavender, mints, savory, marjoram, and marigold that goes to bed with the sun and with him rises weeping; how spring and youth have their own daffodils, that come before the swallow dares and take the winds of March with beauty, or dim violets, or pale primroses that maid-like die unmarried; the old poetic feud of natural and artificial makes its appearance, and critic Perdita rules out the carnations and pied gillyvors as nature's bastards.[1] So too the rustic world has its own type of the marvellous — marvels of ballads: one to a very doleful tune, how a usurer's wife was brought to bed of twenty money-bags at a burthen; another ballad of a fish that appeared forty thousand fathom above water, and sang against the hard hearts of maids:

Dorcas. Is it true too, think you?
Autolycus. Five justices' hands at it, and witnesses more than my pack will hold.

If commerce is to appear at all in this idyllic life, it must come dancing in.

Lawn as white as driven snow;
Cyprus black as e'er was crow;
Gloves as sweet as damask roses;
Masks for faces and for noses;
Bugle bracelet, necklace amber;
Perfume for a lady's chamber;

[1] Compare the whole passage (IV. iv. 79–103), as a most important pronouncement on critical questions in an unexpected context.

Golden quoifs and stomachers,
For my lads to give their dears;
Pins and poking-sticks of steel,
What maids lack from head to heel:
Come, buy of me, come; come buy, come buy.

Even evil, the inseparable attendant of human life, is seen in a softened form. It has flown over many knavish professions and settled into 'roguery': the word is used in the spirit in which it is applied to the nursery, and the name of the rogue Autolycus takes us back to Homer, to the primeval simplicity that saw a god in Mercury, snapper-up of unconsidered trifles. This Autolycus is no highwayman in dread of the gallows; his revenue is the silly cheat, and for the life to come he sleeps out the thought of it. His delicacy refuses offered charity from the passer-by who has come to his rescue, and, weeping thanks, he leans on his shoulder to pick his pocket, and warn him against one Autolycus.[1] His merry frauds make Honesty a fool, and Trust, his sworn brother, a very simple gentleman:[2] under the spell of pastoral poetry they come to us as no more than the necessary shading for the bright picture of contented simplicity.

Jog on, jog on, the foot-path way,
And merrily hent the stile-a:
A merry heart goes all the day,
Your sad tires in a mile-a.

In these surroundings of rustic simplicity, the healing peace of nature for the distractions of social life, events are slowly preparing the restoration which is to crown the plot. The foundling grows into the lovely Perdita, a shepherdess in outward guise, while her foster father — mysteriously to the neighbours — is grown from very nothing to an unspeakable estate. The presence of Perdita transforms a sheep-shearing feast into an assembly of petty gods, herself a Flora, peering in April's front. So thinks the son of Polixenes: for the time-honoured machinery of a falcon's flight[3]

[1] IV. iii, from 31. [2] IV. iv. 606. [3] IV. iv. 14.

across her father's ground has brought the shepherd maiden a prince for a lover, and in the midst of lowly life he has found his perfection.

> What you do
> Still betters what is done. When you speak, sweet,
> I'ld have you do it ever: when you sing,
> I'ld have you buy and sell so, so give alms,
> Pray so; and, for the ordering your affairs,
> To sing them too: when you dance, I wish you
> A wave o' the sea, that you might ever do
> Nothing but that; move still, still so,
> And own no other function: each your doing,
> So singular in each particular,
> Crowns what you are doing in the present deed,
> That all your acts are queens.[1]

The obscuring his princely highness in a swain's wearing carries back the thoughts of Florizel to the old world, which was ruled by gods that scrupled not at lower transformations to win a beauty no rarer than his love. Nay, the providence of the present seems an accomplice in the innocent intrigue, as we mark the pleasant irony[2] by which the prince takes the hand of the disguised visitor, to make him a reverend witness of the vows he pours forth, the unconscious son protesting in his father's ear that he will wait for no father's consent to so precious an alliance. The explosion of royal wrath comes as a harmless thunder, terrifying only the astonished shepherds and clowns, while roguery delights to mock them from horror to horror.[3]

> The curses [that shepherd] shall have, the tortures he shall feel, will break the back of man, the heart of monster. . . . Those that are germane to him, though removed fifty times, shall all come under the hangman. . . . He has a son, who shall be flayed alive; then 'nointed over with honey, set on the head of a wasp's nest; then stand till he be three quarters and a dram dead; then recovered again with aqua-

[1] IV. iv. 136. [2] IV. iv, from 371. [3] IV. iv. 431; and again from 699.

> vitæ or some other hot infusion; then, raw as he is, and in the hottest day prognostication proclaims, shall he be set against a brick-wall, the sun looking with a southward eye upon him, where he is to behold him with flies blown to death. But what talk we of these traitorly rascals, whose miseries are to be smiled at, their offences being so capital?

Out of this hubbub of rustic confusion Camillo snatches the contrivance,[1] which shall restore himself to his loved Sicilia, and which, pregnant with more of restoration than he knows, shall make him preserver of father as of son, healer for Sicilia's royal house as well as Bohemia's. The process of disentanglement gathers force, and the roguery of the story is drawn in to play a part: though he is not naturally honest, Autolycus is so sometimes by chance.[2] With the flying lovers and the pursuing king the scene shifts again back to Sicilia. In rapid play of incident each knot of the entanglement is duly untied; each woe relieved gives space to feel those that are left; passions of penitence, surprise, joyful reunion, interchange as wonder succeeds to wonder. The simple clowns in their terrible trouble become important personages in court excitements; discomfited roguery has no worse penance than to behave humbly to the rustic victims, who receive apologies graciously.

> We must be gentle, now we are gentlemen.[3]

At last the movement of the plot has gone the full round of the arch, and the dignity of the opening scenes is paralleled as Leontes, with only the one great woe of his life unhealed, kneels in penitence before the wondrous statue, and sees it descend and grow before his eyes into warm life and forgiving love. And if Paulina is still left in lonely sorrow for her mate irremediably lost, a comforter is at hand in Camillo; the autumn idyl that unites these two — the main contrivers of the disentanglement — is the final note in the restoration, and the oracle of lost and found stands complete.

[1] IV. iv, from 519. [2] IV. iv. 637–98; 732. [3] V. ii. 164.

We saw the wrong of Leontes as moral disease: in what followed disease has found healing. In the physiological world healing is in the main a process of Nature, though time and human skill may assist. So here, we seemed to move a step nearer to Nature as we passed from the specialised life of the court to pastoral simplicity. When the time enlarged to take in a new generation, and sombre pictures of middle life gave place to the ever fresh wonder of young love, we could realise how the successive generations of mankind have their part in the healing force of Nature, the flooding tide of humanity washing away evil left by the ebb. Nor has human aid been wanting to this process of healing, skill and patience meeting in Camillo and Paulina. But there is more than this. Poetry is not merely dramatised philosophy; its function is to create, but always such creations as appeal to a spectator's sympathy. Fiction is crowded with sympathetic pictures of revenge, of intrigue, of ambitions. Yet nothing in the whole world is more beautiful in itself than redemption: in this play Shakespeare does poetic service in choosing redemption for his theme, and in presenting it with just the beauty of setting that is harmonious with it, down to the last touch of perfect balance by which the sixfold loss so strangely culminates in a sixfold restoration.

Turning to *Cymbeline*, we find the same interest of plot, with the addition of complexity: tangled wrong here works dramatically to harmonious restoration. The regular arch has been used to illustrate the movement of some of Shakespeare's tragedies, where a career seems to rise to a central climax and as gradually decline; for the plays of this chapter the movement is the arch reversed, and the varied interests sink downward to a lowest depth, from which they gradually rise to the level of restoration. As in *Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare uses the supernatural light of the oracle to read into clearness the intricate workings of providence.

The wrong presented is no longer a single thing, like the jealousy of Leontes, but manifold, and emanating from different individuals. Here, as elsewhere, the poet's treatment suggests a scale of graded wrong, from less to more. We have Blind Wrong: injury done by one who acts innocently, according to the best light he possesses. Then we find what may be called Perverse Wrong: plainly and even grievously evil, yet founded on a perverted sense of right. Finally, we have conscious and unmitigated Villany, yet even here with a difference between the villany that is crafty, and the crime that is not less villanous than stupid. Six separate wrongs, illustrating degrees of this moral scale, make the sixfold complication: the different characters, by natural reaction and the working of events, pass down the arch of movement and up to what is possible of restoration.

Cymbeline himself illustrates blind wrong, alike in regard to Belarius and to Posthumus. Belarius tells his own story.[1]

> My body's mark'd
> With Roman swords, and my report was once
> First with the best of note: Cymbeline loved me;
> And when a soldier was the theme, my name
> Was not far off: . . .
> . . . Two villains whose false oaths prevail'd
> Before my perfect honour, swore to Cymbeline
> I was confederate with the Romans; so
> Follow'd my banishment.

Similarly, in Posthumus the King banishes an innocent man; but the play enables us to see the clever Queen manufacturing the evidence which is to deceive her husband, as part of her elaborate plot to secure the succession for her son.[2] It is impossible for one placed so high as a King to search out for himself at first hand all the affairs in which he has to judge; he must act on evidence supplied to him, and Cymbeline acts for the best. But what is the sequel? At first we see the deed returning most remarkably on the doer; the rebound of Cymbeline's innocent injuries robs him

[1] III. iii. 55.

[2] I. i. 103; III. v. 60-5.

of his two sons, and then of his daughter. Yet, as the ways of providence gradually unfold and bring the climax, those whom the King has injured are led, in the mere passion of battle, to a miracle of heroism: Belarius and his foster children are "the old man and his sons," taken for angels, who make a Thermopylæ of a narrow lane, and turn Roman victory into defeat; while the "fourth man in a silly habit who gave the affront with them" was the banished Posthumus.[1] All unconsciously to himself, without intention on their part, the innocent injurer has been delivered by his victims in the supreme crisis.

Analysis is more difficult when we come to that wrong which is founded on a perversion of right. Three of the trains of interest making up the plot of the play must be referred to this heading. The first is comparatively easy. The story of Belarius is a simple story of retaliation.[2]

> O Cymbeline! heaven and my conscience knows
> Thou didst unjustly banish me: whereon,
> At three and two years old, I stole these babes,
> Thinking to bar thee of succession, as
> Thou reft'st me of my lands. . . .
> Having received the punishment before
> For that which I did then: beaten for loyalty
> Excited me to treason.

Revenge, as all moralists will recognise, is merely the high motive of justice in distorted form. It is interesting to watch this story of retaliation working out. To speak of the hard life of exile in savage wilderness to which Belarius has doomed himself seems a small point; the real interest is that not only does the avenger, as we have seen, rescue the object of his vengeance, but he rescues him unwittingly. It is against his will and striving that the old warrior is brought to the battle-field,[3] where martial ardour overpowers him; and the force dragging him thither is the youthful excitement of the stolen boys, whom Belarius loves as his own, and

[1] V. iii, whole scene.
[2] III. iii. 99; compare V. v, from 336.
[3] IV. iv, whole scene.

in whom the inborn nobility which he has sought to obscure is suddenly asserting itself.

The wrong of Posthumus is the commonest of moral perversions: the false sense of honour that dares not refuse a challenge, whatever be the moral cost implied in its acceptance. It is the perversion which is the product of social narrowness and artificiality; the duellist dreads the sentiment immediately surrounding him in the coterie that has dubbed itself "men of honour," and forgets the great world with its balanced judgments and eternal principles of right. At the opening of the play[1] disinterested courtiers exhaust superlatives in their characterisation of Posthumus as the perfect man; even Iachimo, in describing the circumstances of the fatal dispute, speaks a like language.

> The good Posthumus, —
> What should I say? he was too good to be
> Where ill men were; and was the best of all
> Amongst the rarest of good ones, — sitting sadly,
> Hearing us praise our loves of Italy. . . . This Posthumus
> Most like a noble lord in love and one
> That had a royal lover, took his hint,
> And, not dispraising whom we praised, — therein
> He was as calm as virtue — he began
> His mistress' picture.[2]

Up to this point Posthumus is innocent, and moreover has depth of nature to appreciate the perfection and purity of Imogen. But when the challenge is made that even this purity may be conquered, Posthumus surrenders to the lower standard of morals around him, where virtue can be made a thing of wager and there is not capacity deep enough to take in perfection. In such an atmosphere, zeal to demonstrate to the world his wife's purity, and then punish with the sword the self-confessed slanderer, blinds Posthumus to the crime he is committing: that to the loyal wife who implicitly trusts him he is commending as his noble and valued friend the man who comes expressly to assail her.[3] The evil thus started

[1] I. i. 17, etc. [2] V. v. 157. [3] Compare the letter: I. vi. 22.

on its downward career we can watch round its circle of movement. When the false story is told to Posthumus, his unnaturally inflated confidence undergoes sudden collapse; while impartial bystanders cry for more evidence, the one most concerned leaps to belief, and with passionate paradox embraces the vilest conceptions of womankind and sexual honour.[1] He soon descends to lower crime, and despatches to his servant Pisanio the letter that is subornation to murder. This murder being supposed to be accomplished, in the latter half of the action Posthumus is seen the prey of bitter remorse. While he still credits the false news, he feels that Imogen is even yet better than himself.[2]

> Gods! if you
> Should have ta'en vengeance on my faults, I never
> Had lived to put on this: so had you saved
> The noble Imogen to repent, and struck
> Me, wretch more worth your vengeance. But, alack,
> You snatch some hence for little faults; that's love,
> To have them fall no more: you some permit
> To second ills with ills, each elder worse.

The remorse expresses itself in action: Posthumus has been brought with the nobles of his exiled home to the invasion of Britain; he changes his appearance with the disguise of a Briton peasant, that he may at least find his death fighting on the side of Imogen's people.[3] As we have seen, instead of death he is led to prodigies of valour which save Imogen's country and father. Posthumus cannot yet forgive himself; he puts on the guise of a Roman again, courting capture and death.[4] Imprisoned, he has leisure for further remorse:[5]

> Most welcome, bondage! for thou art a way,
> I think, to liberty . . . my conscience, thou art fetter'd
> More than my shanks and wrists: you good gods, give
> The penitent instrument to pick that bolt,
> Then, free for ever!

[1] II. iv, whole scene, especially 113, 130; II. v.
[2] V. i. [3] V. i. 21. [4] V. iii. 75. [5] V. iv.

From expectation of immediate execution Posthumus passes into the scene of the dénouement;[1] with its continued shiftings the various sides of the story are in his hearing made clear; until — as if it were a single stroke symbolising the plot as a whole — Posthumus, by a petulant blow struck at the page who is the disguised Imogen,[2] shatters the complex entanglement, and brings the discovery in which the whole confusion is harmonised.

Of Iachimo the wrong would seem too foul to find any palliation. Yet even here, in the first inception, we can see perversion of right. There is a sort of spurious zeal for truth in the scepticism that sets itself against enthusiastic faith, and seeks by some test of fact to convict it as pretentious boasting. But such scepticism easily passes into a cynical antagonism to the ideal itself; and so it is in the present case.[3]

> I make my wager rather against your confidence than her reputation; and, to bar your offence herein too, I durst attempt it against any lady in the world.

In such a spirit as this Iachimo opens his[4] intrigue against Imogen. In a moment there comes a sudden reaction:[5] in the shame of repulse from a purity he had not had capacity to imagine Iachimo is carried from cynicism to the passion of revenge. His device for procuring the secrets of the bedchamber is revenge as against Imogen: but what is it in reference to Posthumus? There is honour among thieves, and the idlest man of pleasure has a virtuous horror of cheating at cards; judged by his own shallow standards Iachimo is descending to the deepest depth when he manufactures false evidence with which to win a wager he has lost. The after part of the play exhibits Iachimo covered with shame; and shame — to our surprise — begets remorse,[6] revealing a better nature that had been buried but not lost. Brought with

[1] V. iv, from 152.
[2] V. v, from 227.
[3] I. iv, whole scene.
[4] I. vi, from 32.
[5] I. vi: compare 156, 180–210; and II. ii, from 11.
[6] V. ii, 1.

the other Roman nobles to the British war, Iachimo in his first onset finds himself discomfited by a peasant.

> The heaviness and guilt within my bosom
> Takes off my manhood: I have belied a lady,
> The princess of this country, and the air on't
> Revengingly enfeebles me; or could this carl,
> A very drudge of nature's, have subdued me
> In my profession?

He is drawn onward in the tangled perplexities of the plot, until, at a word of challenge, the cynic pours forth an enthusiasm of confession, in which the perfectness of the two against whom he has sinned is made clear by the fulness of his self-humiliation.[1]

Besides blind wrong and perverted right the story gives us villany unrelieved; two types of it, the crafty villany of the queen and the stupid villany of Cloten.

> That such a crafty devil as is his mother
> Should yield the world this ass! a woman that
> Bears all down with her brain; and this her son
> Cannot take two from twenty, for his heart,
> And leave eighteen.[2]

There is no need to dwell upon the crimes of poison and slander by which the queen is intriguing to make a way for her son Cloten to the crown; she becomes dramatically interesting by her relation to the reaction of the plot. After all the intrigues have prospered, at the very last all is lost through the mysterious absence of him for whose sake the crimes were perpetrated;[3] under the strain of this mocking fate villany turns against itself.[4]

> *Cymbeline.* How ended she?
> *Cornelius.* With horror, madly dying, like her life;
> Which, being cruel to the world, concluded
> Most cruel to herself.

[1] V. v, from 141.
[2] II. i. 57.
[3] IV. iii. 2–9.
[4] V. v. 23–68 and 244–60.

The long train of crimes confessed by the queen follows, and the doctor concludes:

> *Cornelius.* But, failing of her end by his strange absence,
> Grew shameless-desperate; open'd, in despite
> Of heaven and men, her purposes; repented
> The evils she hatch'd were not effected; so
> Despairing died.

There seems to me to be a fine psychological touch in the *shameless-desperate:* successful wickedness, mocked at the last moment, flies through petulance to suicide; the craft of lifelong concealment, impotent to hurt, can at least shock by venting its own shamelessness. And, in the general working out of events, this confession of guilt takes obstacles out of the way of the growing disentanglement. It is the same with Cloten and his gross purposes. The final stroke in his revenge is to adopt the very dress of Posthumus with which to assail and ruin Imogen;[1] in the strange turns of circumstance his headless trunk is recognised by this dress,[2] is wept over and tenderly buried by Imogen herself: this pious office, done unconsciously to her intending destroyer, brings Imogen in contact with Lucius and the Roman hosts, and so draws her into the current of events which in the end will bring back to her all she has lost. In both the threads of villany that run through the story, we see the irony of death making discomfited villany a link in the chain of restoration.

Thus complex is the plot of *Cymbeline.* Instead of some simple outburst of passion, far-reaching in its consequences, we here have varied types of evil, from unconscious injury to gross crime made still fouler by folly. Six distinct personalities are centres of wrong, each sufficient for a complete plot: in the providential working of events we see blind wrong blindly restored; retaliation of evil unconsciously led to retaliation of good for evil; perverted right — like diseases that must become worse before they can become better — by sudden reaction growing to conscious wrong, and then

[1] III. v, from 124. [2] IV. ii. 308.

led in the course of nature and circumstance to suffering and redemption; while that which is too evil to be itself restored is overruled into a means of restoration for others.

But in Shakespeare symmetry goes hand in hand with complexity. The sixfold wrong has a sixfold victim: the separate trains of evil are drawn into a unity by the way in which they one and all strike at Imogen. Through the error of Cymbeline Imogen has lost her husband, through the retaliation of Belarius she has lost her brothers; Posthumus's sin robs her of her love, and the crime of Iachimo robs her of her reputation; by the queen her life is threatened, and the villany of Cloten threatens her honour. In the sequel all these are saved or restored, and Imogen appears a motive centre for the whole of this many-sided plot: in her the lines of complication meet,[1] and her sufferings are foremost among the forces of resolution.

The forces that make for restoration in the play of *Cymbeline* also appear sixfold; in fact they are not different from what we may trace in *Winter's Tale*, or in human life as a whole, but the complexity of the plot presents them more clearly to our analysis. We mark the suffering innocence of Hermione in the one play and Imogen in the other, wifely dignity and sweetness maintaining loyalty under the bitterest wrongs; not only do these sufferings work healing remorse in the injurers, but we see clearly the wanderings of the outcast Imogen make links in the chain of events which is slowly bringing back happiness. Suffering guilt appears in Leontes, in Posthumus and Iachimo; we have already noted how actions in which Posthumus and Iachimo are expressing remorse lead up to changes of fortune. To suffering fidelity is clearly committed a ministry of restoration: Paulina's bold stand saves her queen, but loses for herself a loved husband; Pisanio, distracted between claims of master and mistress, maintains fidelity at the cost of being threatened by the poison of the Queen and the sword of Cloten, and even by the suspicions of Imogen herself.[2] In both

[1] See below, Appendix, page 351.

[2] I. v. 78; III. v. 83; V. v. 238.

plays is exhibited what may be called honest intrigue. Camillo twice contrives an underhand policy; the physician Cornelius undermines the mining of the royal poisoner, supplying drugs which kill only in appearance:

> She is fool'd
> With a most false effect; and I the truer
> So to be false with her.[1]

In such cases the weapons of wrong are turned against itself, and there is conscious coöperation with the forces of restoration.

Notably in this play appears Nature as a healing force. In *Winter's Tale* we have seen this conception developed to a prominence that cast other forces of restoration into the shade; like fresh air substituted for a confined room came the passage, at the centre of the plot, from city to country life. By a similar effect, at the exact centre of the play of *Cymbeline*, as first note of the change from complication to resolution, we have the cave of Belarius amid its Welsh mountains, and the contrast between country and court.[2]

> Stoop, boys: this gate
> Instructs you how to adore the heavens, and bows you
> To a morning's holy office: the gates of monarchs
> Are arch'd so high that giants may jet through
> And keep their impious turbans on, without
> Good morrow to the sun . . .
> Now for our mountain sport: up to yond hill!
> Your legs are young: I'll tread these flats. Consider,
> When you above perceive me like a crow,
> That it is place which lessens and sets off:
> And you may then revolve what tales I have told you
> Of courts, of princes, of the tricks in war. . . .
> . . . O, this life
> Is nobler than attending for a check,
> Richer than doing nothing for a bauble,
> Prouder than rustling in unpaid-for silk.

[1] I. v. 42. [2] III. iii.

In all the sequel, though as a single thread intertwining with others, we find this interest of open-air life maintained; side by side with scenes of camp and court we get the primitive simplicity of outdoor life, the cave and forest, joys of hunting, rustic feasts and rural obsequies; the spirit of the Welsh mountains is seen to mould the events that are leading up to the climax. Nature again is seen in the mystic sympathy that draws the boys of the cave to the slim page their guest, so that one of them says:[1]

> . . . The bier at door,
> And a demand who is't shall die, I'll say
> 'My father, not this youth'—

and the supposed father must secretly recognise that the boy speaks more naturally than he can know. Above all, the force of Nature is manifested in the secret reversion to strain of the royal boys, brought up in a rustic life yet reaching after greatness, their princely nerves straining to act the deeds they hear of.

> O thou goddess,
> Thou divine Nature, how thyself thou blazon'st
> In these two princely boys! They are as gentle
> As zephyrs blowing below the violet,
> Not wagging his sweet head; and yet as rough,
> Their royal blood enchafed, as the rudest wind,
> That by the top doth take the mountain pine
> And make him stoop to the vale. 'Tis wonder
> That an invisible instinct should frame them
> To royalty unlearn'd, honour untaught,
> Civility not seen from other, valour
> That wildly grows in them, but yields a crop
> As if it had been sow'd.[2]

We have already seen how it is this boyish excitement for the war that is in the air, and its chances for great deeds, which brings to the scene of the crisis the heroes who are to revolutionise the course of events.

[1] IV. ii. 22. [2] IV. ii. 169.

Suffering innocence, suffering guilt, suffering fidelity, honest intrigue, the healing power of Nature — these are forces of restoration in the story of Cymbeline; a sixth that mingles with the rest and binds them together is the force of an overruling providence. We recognise a moral government of the world as we note each case of perverted right, as if by natural law, work through suffering to its redemption. There is a suggestion of providence in the strange irony by which triumphant villany falls confounded at the last, and in its fall becomes an instrument of restoration. Again, we may fasten our attention upon a single device of the plot, the casket of poison. We see this prepared for the guilty Queen by the deceiving physician,[1] dropped by her in the path of Pisanio,[2] given innocently by Pisanio to Imogen as a charm against the weariness of her journey;[3] Imogen eats from it[4] and is taken for dead, is buried in the grave of Cloten, awakes[5] and recognises the headless body as Posthumus, procures its fitting burial with the aid of the soldiers of Lucius,[6] and is thus brought into the Roman host and into the course of events which are moving to the climax: as we trace this single point along the line of movement we see it as a link binding successive accidents into a chain of providential design. The oracle was to antiquity the revelation of providence, and two oracles illuminate the present plot: the soothsayer's vision[7] — of the Roman eagle winged from spongy south to west and lost in the sunbeams — has the traditional ambiguity, which gives different interpretations according to the prospect of events and their issue; the other oracular message is seen at the close to have predicted correctly with the aid of an etymological quibble which reads *tender air* as *mollis aër*, so as *mulier*, so as *woman*.[8] The mask introduced into the play of *Cymbeline* is simply a dramatisation of providence, Jove and the gods descending to read the meaning of dark dispensations. It may be a question how much of this mask is genuine. But as

[1] I. v. 33.
[2] I. v. 60, etc.
[3] III. iv. 190.
[4] IV. ii. 38.
[5] IV. ii, from 291.
[6] IV. ii, from 353.
[7] IV. ii. 346; V. v. 467.
[8] V. v, from 426.

it stands it unites with other parts of the play in that which, more than anything else, emphasises the providence underlying the whole plot — the emergence from time to time of great principles of moral government. When to Pisanio the drift of events is at its darkest he is made to appeal to a higher power:

> The heavens still must work.

And again,

> All other doubts by time let them be clear'd:
> Fortune brings in some boats that are not steer'd.[1]

The deity of the mask gives comfort against the "mortal accidents" that have befallen Posthumus:

> Whom best I love I cross; to make my gift,
> The more delay'd, delighted. . . .
> He shall be lord of lady Imogen,
> And happier much by his affliction made.[2]

And in the sorest strait to which Imogen is brought in her wanderings words are spoken to her which may well stand as foundation principle of the whole plot:

> Some falls are means the happier to arise.[3]

[1] IV. iii. 41, 45. [2] V. iv. 101. [3] IV. ii. 403.

V

THE LIFE WITHOUT AND THE LIFE WITHIN: THE MASK-TRAGEDY OF *HENRY THE EIGHTH*

THE play of *Henry the Eighth* stands unique among the Shakespearean dramas in regard to its literary form. It is not one of the series of histories; it has no resemblance to comedy; the term tragedy does not fully express it. In exact classification it is historic tragedy interwoven with court mask. And justice must be done to both the constituent elements before the richness of the poem can fully be appreciated.

The mask or pageant — I am not aware that the line of demarcation between the two has ever been drawn precisely — played a much more prominent part in Elizabethan life than would appear from the traces left in permanent literature. The terms cover a great variety of productions, from the extemporised procession greeting a royal personage or a returning hero, to the exquisite masks of Ben Jonson, with their complex structure — of opening, disclosure of the music, disclosure of the maskers, dances, revels, close, and interrupting antimasks — all the fine arts coöperating in a single spectacle. The common element in these various kinds of composition is the dance or procession of persons in costume, the movement being not less symbolic than the costume. One further point is essential: the mask or pageant is always a glorification of some personage or some cause; either the tribute is paid by the general character of the spectacle, or — as so often in Ben Jonson's masks — a compliment is sprung upon us as a surprise, ingeniously fitted into some detail of the action. A modern charade presents successive scenes, each embodying a syllable of a particular word: to guess the key word is not more necessary to

the charade than to emphasise the compliment is essential to the mask.

In this way the play of *Henry the Eighth* is in part a court mask, paying honour to Queen Elizabeth[1] through her mother Anne Bullen. Three out of the five acts are crowned with elaborate spectacles, presenting with pageantry and splendour successive stages in the rise of Anne: her first meeting with Henry, her coronation as queen of England, and — what for the immediate purpose must be regarded as a still higher climax — the christening of her babe Elizabeth. But at this point a difficulty arises. As a matter of common historic knowledge, the elevation of Anne Bullen was at the expense of Queen Katherine, the reigning consort being divorced and relegated to obscurity in order to make way for her maid of honour. Now Katherine was the mother of the late Queen Mary; and matters of this kind must be delicately handled in court spectacles.

To meet this difficulty the author (or authors) of the play have fallen back upon an idea which enters deeply into human life, and is one of the root ideas in the moral system of Shakespeare. It is difficult to express this conception by any term not open to objection; I am here calling it the antithesis of the Outer and the Inner life. The life without is the common life, into which each individual enters with other individuals, having his share in general aims and activities; it is life in the objective. The life within is the subjective attitude to things: each individual is himself a microcosm, all that appears in the universe is regarded from the point of view of his own personality. The distinction is not simply that between outer actions and inner motives; of actions and motives alike it may be asked whether they have their reference to the common world without or to the individual life within. To take a simple illustration. We have before us a painted picture, say, of St. George and the Dragon; we see the figure of a knight in armour riding,

[1] In the eulogistic climax (V. v, from 40) James I is associated with Elizabeth; but this savours of a revision with a view to performance during his reign; there is no other connection of the King with the language or structure of the play.

lance in rest, against a monster. But the visible picture may perhaps admit of more than one interpretation. St. George may be a simple warrior, in the ordinary course of a warrior's life facing a danger that has arisen. Or, we may imagine that this St. George, like the hero of Scott's *Fair Maid of Perth*, has been born into the ranks of chivalry with the physical constitution of a coward; that by supreme moral resolution he has determined to force himself to do all that other warriors do, and he has sought out the dragon as a desperate danger that will furnish stern discipline for his shrinking nerves. The one interpretation makes the picture an incident of the world without, the other an incident of the world within.

This conception of the Outer and Inner life — or, as it has sometimes been called, this antithesis of Doing and Being[1] — has application all over the field of morals. It enters into the analysis of individual character. One man may be great in doing, supreme in power and resource as regards the activities of external life, while in the sphere of being and introspective consciousness he may show nothing but bewilderment and lack of insight: such is Macbeth. Another, like Hamlet, may be at home in self-analysis and all that belongs to the roots of action, and yet show only uncertainty and hesitation when he comes to act. Or the distinction of the two lives may appear in another way. We talk of success and failure, of the rise and fall of historical personages. But what is success in the external life may be failure in the life within: a position of external pomp and dignity may be obtained by a moral sacrifice which plunges the world of being into ruin. Or to the eyes of all without there may be a fall: the life within is conscious of a rise and an expansion in spiritual dignity. It is in the latter form that the application of the antithesis may be made to the play of *Henry the Eighth*. The necessities of the story involve the deg-

[1] Compare an admirable discourse by James Martineau in his *Endeavours after the Christian Life*, page 354. The antithesis is applied to the play of *Macbeth* in my *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist*, Chapter VII; compare also Chapter VIII of the same work.

radation of Queen Katherine; historic fact makes it possible to present this as a fall only in the outer life, while in the life within there is elevation and rising dignity. Thus to the pageants presenting the career of Anne Bullen there are added two of which Katherine is the centre; the one displays the deposition of a queen from her splendid station, the other is a vision of angels, betokening with spiritual splendour the elevation of Katherine as a saint.

The elements of the play, so far as it is a mask, are now complete. What the reader of *Henry the Eighth* may easily underestimate, while he is merely reading, gains its full proportion to the whole when adequate stage setting makes appeal to the eye. Each of the five acts culminates in some pageant;[1] the three acts visibly presenting steps in the rise of Anne — the first meeting, the coronation, the christening — are separated by the two in which spectacular effect suggests the fall of Katherine, a fall which is the elevation of a saint.[2]

The first act ends with the revels of York Place.[3] We have a brief glimpse of court ladies and free-tongued noblemen making merry at the banquet, Cardinal Wolsey encouraging them from under the canopy of state; to the sound of drums and trumpets a troop of maskers interrupt — shepherds from afar, who have left their flocks to gaze on English beauties; with the readiness of court functions the banquet-hall is transformed into a ballroom, and the revels proceed gayly; at the proper moment for the compliment the Cardinal is impressed with the thought that one of these maskers is more worthy than himself of the seat of honour; the King unmasks, banters the churchman at the fair company he keeps, and eagerly inquires the name of the lady with whose charms he has been smitten; all resolve to make a night of it. The whole design of the festivity has been to bring together the King and the lowly beauty who has just come to court. In the second act pomp and pageantry are put to the strangest of uses — to adorn proceed-

[1] The coronation pageant, which serves as crowning spectacle to Act III, comes at the commencement of Act IV.

[2] See below, Appendix, page 369.

[3] I. iv.

ings of a divorce court.[1] Bands of music usher in processions, each more dignified than the preceding; the bewildered eye must take in gowned doctors acting as secretaries, archbishop and attendant bishops arranging themselves as in consistory, officers and nobles bearing aloft symbols — of purse and great seal and cardinal's hat, of silver cross to suggest the spiritual, silver mace the temporal functions of the court, and silver pillars to symbolise the cardinal judges as pillars of the church; nobles and personages of the court make up the crowd; the scarlet majesty of Rome sits to judge, and for the parties to the suit the proud crier can summon into court a crowned king and queen. Yet the whole is understood to be no more than the spectacular setting proper for the deposition of an innocent queen from her high estate. In the third act Anne has risen to the throne, and this is followed by the pageant of coronation,[2] for which state ceremony reserves its supreme efforts of emblematic spectacle. We see the procession of ermined judges, white-robed choristers, musicians; Mayor of London with the quaint symbols of the city, Garter in his gilt copper crown and the mystic devices of heraldry; nobles with sceptres and demi-coronals and wands of office, each in gorgeous vestments reserved for this one occasion; under a canopy, which is the privilege of the Cinque-ports to carry, walks the exquisite Queen in richest adornments, bishops attending, and a proud duchess bearing her train: all that the stage can afford of pomp is concentrated on the spectacle, and when its limits have been reached the effect is carried on by narrative describing the scene within the abbey. In the fourth act we have returned to Katherine, and pageantry becomes supernatural vision;[3] the dark sick chamber is illuminated with mystic light, and white-robed angels with faces of gold move in rhythmic dance around the sleeper, holding crowns of triumph over her head, and bowing low as they mutely proclaim the elevation of a saint to heaven. The fifth act has for climax the christening of the Queen's babe.[4] But here, lest we might tire with the monotony of pomp, a variation is happily contrived. There is all

[1] II. iv. [2] IV. i. [3] IV. ii. [4] V. iv and v.

that is required of sounding trumpets, heralds, civic functionaries, and marshals, duchess godmother under canopy borne by four nobles, and ladies filling up the crowd. But the procession of state is threatened with being jostled out of all order by the crowds that fill the palace yard: knaves from the kitchen, red-nosed artisans, apprentices from the Strand rallying to the cry of 'clubs,' files of boys ready to shower pebbles, and every other type of city life, all pressing on till the gates are giving way, and the sweating porter with his men see no way to keep the crowd back unless they sweep them down with cannon. With this touch is prettily suggested the overpowering popularity of the new-born Elizabeth.

But the play is historic tragedy as well as mask: the interweaving of the two constituent elements is a triumph of structural skill. The effect of the mask just described, we have seen, rests upon the contrast of outer and inner life, bringing out how that which is a fall in the external world may be a rise in the sphere of the spiritual. The same idea binds together the different parts of the tragic matter. Four historical personages in succession become centres of interest, and for each there is tragedy in its simplest sense — the fall from an exalted position.[1]

> Think ye see
> The very persons of our noble story
> As they were living; think you see them great,
> And follow'd with the general throng and sweat
> Of thousand friends; then in a moment, see
> How soon this mightiness meets misery.[2]

But in each case the treatment brings out the contrast of external world and individual life; in each case we see, on the one side of the turning-point, external power and splendour; on the other side a humiliation, which nevertheless appears as exaltation in spiritual dignity and beauty.

The first of the four personages is Buckingham. In the open-

[1] See below, on the meaning of tragedy, pages 187–188.

[2] Prologue, line 25.

ing scene Buckingham appears in a position of exalted rank and social power: he voices the old nobility of England, scorning the upstart favourite. Not pride of birth alone, but supreme wisdom and unsurpassed eloquence have made him "the great duke." The conversation turns upon the Field of the Cloth of Gold, and Buckingham bitterly inveighs against the presumptuous insolence that has lavished upon spectacles empty of results treasures dearly bought, and has disposed the too servile nobles according to the individual pleasure of a parvenu. Where others tremble before the mighty cardinal, Buckingham faces him with disdain for disdain; brother nobles speak words of caution, but Buckingham blurts out in plain language what others think; he will expose to the King what he calls "a kind of puppy to the old dam treason," the way in which the holy wolf or fox has imperilled the costly French alliance in order to intrigue secretly with the emperor, thus buying and selling the royal honour. But before he can move a step, Buckingham feels the hand of arrest on his shoulder: as the names of accusers are spoken the whole secret plot is visible to him at a glance, and he knows the end from the beginning.

> I am the shadow of poor Buckingham.

We are to see the ruined hero a second time[1] when all is accomplished. We hear described by eye-witness the scenes of the trial: how, pleading "not guilty," Buckingham alleged many sharp reasons to defeat the law — in vain; how he demanded to be confronted with the witnesses, and found himself unable to fling their accusations from him; how his peers found him guilty of high treason, and he spoke much and learnedly for life, but all in vain.

> When he was brought again to the bar, to hear
> His knell rung out, his judgement, he was stirr'd
> With such an agony, he sweat extremely,
> And something spoke in choler, ill, and hasty:
> But he fell to himself again, and sweetly
> In all the rest show'd a most noble patience.

[1] II. i.

It is the last two lines that convey the crisis of the incident: in the shock of ruin a character emerges, as if from under eclipse, a character of patient dignity, fairness to foes and tenderness to friends. The fallen nobleman is seen in the procession of death, the axe's edge turned towards him.

> All good people,
> You that have thus far come to pity me,
> Hear what I say, and then go home and lose me.
> I have this day received a traitor's judgement,
> And by that name must die: yet, heaven bear witness,
> And if I have a conscience, let it sink me,
> Even as the axe falls, if I be not faithful!
> The law I bear no malice for my death;
> 'T has done, upon the premises, but justice:
> But those that sought it I could wish more Christians.

We have the calm rectitude that will be just to itself, but no less just to its foes. No false humility shall sue for the king's mercy, yet injury has no effect upon loyalty.

> My vows and prayers
> Yet are the king's, and, till my soul forsake,
> Shall cry for blessings on him: may he live
> Longer than I have time to tell his years!
> Ever beloved and loving may his rule be!
> And when old time shall lead him to his end,
> Goodness and he fill up one monument!

The victim feels an exaltation beyond that of his triumphant enemies.

> Yet I am richer than my base accusers,
> That never knew what truth meant: I now seal it;
> And with that blood will make 'em one day groan for't.

Yet Buckingham is no stoic, dying in stern independence: the tenderness that is in him yearns for supporting friendship.

> You few that loved me,
> And dare be bold to weep for Buckingham,
> His noble friends and fellows, whom to leave

Is only bitter to him, only dying,
Go with me, like good angels, to my end;
And, as the long divorce of steel falls on me,
Make of your prayers one sweet sacrifice,
And lift my soul to heaven.

As we view the scene we forget to moralise about arbitrary tyranny and resistance to oppression: what engrosses us is a transforming revolution in a great personality.

The second of the four centres of interest is Queen Katherine. Her name has become forever associated with spotless wifehood and injured dignity. Yet in the earlier scenes she appears before us in a position of lofty exaltation and external power. When she enters the council chamber as a suitor,[1] the King, secretly conscious of failing faith, raises her from her knees with what is more than ceremony.

Half your suit
Never name to us; you have half our power:
The other moiety, ere you ask, is given;
Repeat your will and take it.

Katherine is a mouthpiece for the oppression of the people caused by the Cardinal's exactions, under which the back is sacrifice to the load, and cold hearts freeze allegiance: Henry is indignant, and then and there the Cardinal is ordered to recall his unlawful act. Still more impressive appears the lofty position of Katherine in the incident of the divorce court.[2] The whole power of the kingdom, in alliance with Rome that claims kingship over kings, is concentrated upon an attempt to undo her. Where her part in the programme begins, she thrusts aside the rôle assigned her, and kneeling before the King and the husband speaks the language of simple directness, urges the plea of spotless reputation and conjugal bliss blessed by offspring, appeals to the famous king-craft that contrived the alliance: the fickle Henry for a moment is entirely won. The Cardinal in alarm interposing, she turns upon him with untempered indignation.

[1] I. ii. [2] II. iv.

> I do believe,
> Induced by potent circumstances, that
> You are mine enemy, and make my challenge
> You shall not be my judge: for it is you
> Have blown this coal betwixt my lord and me:
> Which God's dew quench! Therefore I say again,
> I utterly abhor, yea, from my soul
> Refuse you for my judge; . . . and here
> Before you all appeal unto the Pope.

Katherine sweeps with dignity out of the court, and refuses to return: in a single moment the elaborate plot has fallen disconcerted.

This is the highest point of exaltation for Katherine; her humiliation is not a sudden catastrophe, but rather a slow thrusting down step by step.[1] Like some noble thing standing at bay, the Queen is driven from point to point by irresistible force. Advanced in life, with faded beauty, all the fellowship she can hold with the King being her obedience, how can she prevail against a passion excited by a youthful beauty? how can one woman's wit stand against consummate craft acting upon a royal power longing to be convinced? Katherine can but wrap herself in her virtue, fold after fold, as she withdraws herself into the depths of the inner life. To the last there is no compromising the queenly dignity she claims by sacred right of marriage;[2] she does not cease to unmask the "cardinal vices" that would hypocritically pass for "cardinal virtues."[3] But she is alone against a world.

> Shipwreck'd upon a kingdom, where no pity,
> No friends, no hope; no kindred weep for me;
> Almost no grave allow'd me: like the lily,
> That once was mistress of the field and flourish'd,
> I'll hang my head and perish.[4]

She subdues herself to counsel with her foes;[5] she invokes the old love to seek protection for the fortunes of her child and her

[1] Compare III. i, and IV. ii.
[2] *E.g.* IV. ii, from 100.
[3] III. i. 103.
[4] III. i. 149.
[5] III. i. 181.

poor attendants;[1] she welcomes even the faithful chronicler recalling the forgotten virtues of the Cardinal who has ruined her.[2] Her unstained self has become the whole world in which she now lives and moves.

> Good Griffith,
> Cause the musicians play me that sad note
> I named my knell, whilst I sit meditating
> On that celestial harmony I go to.

But the world within extends to a region which the stage can touch only in symbol; and in unearthly light of vision glory we see the discrowned queen prepared for coronation beyond the grave.

It is however Wolsey in whom the interest of the history mainly centres. There is no need to dwell upon the unparalleled exaltation and power of the famous Cardinal during the first half of the story: how the commons groan under his exactions; the nobles hate yet dare not speak, or if they resist are crushed; how France and Spain bid against one another for the influence of the minister, and are both used to make capital for his own private designs upon the papacy. In the change of fortune that comes at the height of Wolsey's greatness both nemesis and accident concur. The scruples of conscience about the legality of the marriage with Katherine are of course only the cover to the real bait with which the Cardinal is angling for the King.

> *Chamberlain.* It seems the marriage with his brother's wife
> Has crept too near his conscience.
> *Suffolk.* No, his conscience
> Has crept too near another lady.[3]

The churchman and cardinal is using the beauty of a young girl to turn the King's thoughts from an elderly wife, and dispose him to a second marriage; Wolsey will have the chance of negotiating with some great power for a royal alliance, and will know how to snatch his own advantage out of diplomatic bargaining.[4] But the engineer

[1] IV. ii, from 127.
[2] IV. ii. 69.
[3] II. ii. 17.
[4] III. ii. 85–90, 94–104.

is hoist with his own petard : Henry is not only smitten with Anne's beauty, but will marry herself and no one else. Wolsey has just realised, in profound meditation, how his scheme has recoiled upon himself; lost in thought he stands some time before he is aware of the King's presence; he plunges into apologies, but, with the famous frown, the King thrusts papers into his hand.[1]

> Read o'er this;
> And after, this: and then to breakfast with
> What appetite you have.

In a moment Wolsey seizes the situation :[2] by unthinkable accident he has handed to the King, in a bundle of various state papers, his own private note of his ill-gotten wealth, and worse still, his plan of counterworking against the King's darling project of the divorce. For a moment the fallen minister makes a fight,[3] as malignant courtiers crowd around to triumph over him.

> *Surrey.* Now, if you can blush and cry 'guilty,' cardinal,
> You'll show a little honesty.
> *Wolsey.* Speak on, Sir;
> I dare your worst objections: if I blush,
> It is to see a nobleman want manners.

But, left alone, Wolsey realises that all is over.[4]

> Farewell, a long farewell, to all my greatness!
> This is the state of man: to-day he puts forth
> The tender leaves of hopes; to-morrow blossoms,
> And bears his blushing honours thick upon him;
> The third day comes a frost, a killing frost,
> And, when he thinks, good easy man, full surely
> His greatness is a-ripening, nips his root,
> And then he falls, as I do. I have ventured,
> Like little wanton boys that swim on bladders,
> This many summers in a sea of glory,
> But far beyond my depth: my high-blown pride

[1] III. ii. 85–203.
[2] III. ii, from 204.
[3] III. ii. 228–349.
[4] III. ii. 350.

At length broke under me and now has left me,
Weary and old with service, to the mercy
Of a rude stream, that must for ever hide me.
Vain pomp and glory of this world, I hate ye:
I feel my heart new open'd. O, how wretched
Is that poor man that hangs on princes' favours!
There is, betwixt that smile we would aspire to,
That sweet aspect of princes, and their ruin,
More pangs and fears than wars on women have:
And when he falls, he falls like Lucifer,
Never to hope again.

I feel my heart new opened: the shock of ruin that has quenched for Wolsey the glory of external state has rekindled the life within.

Never so truly happy, my good Cromwell.
I know myself now; and I feel within me
A peace above all earthly dignities,
A still and quiet conscience. The king has cured me,
I humbly thank his grace; and from these shoulders,
These ruin'd pillars, out of pity, taken
A load would sink a navy, too much honour.[1]

From servants weeping to leave so noble and true a master,[2] from foes seeking to do him bare justice,[3] we have the other side of Wolsey's character, forgotten by men in the glare of his meteor-like rise: how from lowly birth he had climbed to honour, full of sweetness to his friends, and for his country catching the new spiritual richness of the times, and using wealth to found those treasuries of wisdom that are to make Christendom speak his virtue forever. From all this he has been diverted by the temptations of ambitious opportunities such as perhaps never came to a subject before: now he returns to his better self, and sees things in their true proportions.

Cromwell, I charge thee, fling away ambition;
By that sin fell the angels; how can man, then,
The image of his Maker, hope to win by it?
Love thyself last: cherish those hearts that hate thee;
Corruption wins not more than honesty.

[1] III. ii. 377. [2] III. ii. 422. [3] IV. ii.

> Still in thy right hand carry gentle peace,
> To silence envious tongues. Be just, and fear not:
> Let all the ends thou aim'st at be thy country's,
> Thy God's, and truth's; then if thou fall'st, O Cromwell,
> Thou fall'st a blessed martyr.[1]

Men pour cheap sarcasm on the late repentance, that would atone with easy contrition for the evil which has missed its prize. But thus to speak is to misread the relations of the Outer and the Inner life. In the great life of England Wolsey is the ambitious self-seeker justly overthrown; no words of his can buy back a place for him, and he knows his destiny to be forgotten, and "sleep in dull cold marble, where no mention of him" is to be heard. But the spiritual world — as the Parable of the Labourers teaches us — has no material divisions of time or scale of retributive balance, no barrier against him who enters at the eleventh hour. From greatness of soul Wolsey had been diverted by temporal aims: to greatness of soul he returns.

> His overthrow heap'd happiness upon him;
> For then, and not till then, he felt himself,
> And found the blessedness of being little:
> And, to add greater honours to his age
> Than man could give him, he died fearing God.[2]

Yet a fourth personage enters into the plot of the play — Cranmer. Here the fall is only threatened; the averting of ruin has the effect of reversing the usual order, and we see Cranmer first patient in humiliation, afterwards exalted and triumphant.[3] The reader must not allow himself to be disturbed by any different conception of Archbishop Cranmer to which he may have been led by his study of history; undoubtedly the Cranmer of this play is the "good old man," the marvel of more than human meekness and forgiveness of injuries; the common voice says, "Do my Lord of Canterbury a shrewd turn, and he is your friend forever."[4] His part in the matter of the divorce has made the archbishop

[1] III. ii. 440. [2] IV. ii. 64. [3] V. i, ii, iii, v. [4] V. iii. 177.

the king's hand and tongue. But Henry, swelling with consciousness of the divine right of kings which was the religion of the age, is nevertheless unconsciously swayed to right and left by whatever influence gets his ear; the feud of Catholic and Protestant is in an acute stage, and Gardiner, successor to the leadership of Wolsey, holds Cranmer an arch-heretic, a pestilence infecting the land, a rank weed to be rooted out. The King sends for the archbishop,[1] and regretfully explains the grievous complaints he has heard, putting as his own thought what others have instilled into his mind, that so high-placed a personage as the Archbishop of Canterbury must be sent to the Tower before accusers will venture to come forward. To Henry's surprise this calls forth no resentment.

> I humbly thank your highness;
> And am right glad to catch this good occasion
> Most thoroughly to be winnow'd, where my chaff
> And corn shall fly asunder: for, I know,
> There's none stands under more calumnious tongues
> Than I myself, poor man . . .
> The good I stand on is my truth and honesty:
> If they shall fail, I, with mine enemies,
> Will triumph o'er my person; which I weigh not,
> Being of those virtues vacant.

In vain the King dwells on the dangers that threaten his former friend: Cranmer understands, but protests innocence, winning Henry entirely.

> Look, the good man weeps!
> He's honest, on mine honour.

The King gives the archbishop a signet ring, which in the last resort he may use as token of appeal from council to the royal judgment. Later on we see Canterbury — in dignity the first subject of the land — kept outside the door of the council-chamber amid grooms and lackeys;[2] when admitted,[3] he is

[1] V. i, from 80. [2] V. ii. [3] V. iii.

denied his seat at the council, and bitterly denounced by his fellow-councillors, as a spreader of pernicious heresies. The accused maintains his unvarying self-restraint.

> Love and meekness, lord,
> Become a churchman better than ambition:
> Win straying souls with modesty again,
> Cast none away.

Only when he is about to be sent to the Tower does Cranmer produce the ring and make his appeal. As if he had been listening at the keyhole Henry suddenly bursts in at the exact moment, frowning the well known frown.[1]

> Good man, sit down. Now let me see the proudest
> He, that dares most, but wag his finger at thee.

The ready flatteries of Gardiner and others are too thin to hide the offences of the councillors.

> *Surrey.* May it please your grace, —
> *King.* No, sir, it does not please me.
> I had thought I had had men of some understanding
> And wisdom of my council; but I find none.
> Was it discretion, lords, to let this man,
> This good man, — few of you deserve that title, —
> This honest man, wait like a lousy footboy
> At chamber-door? and one as great as you are?

After being rated like schoolboys the lords of the council are compelled to embrace Canterbury with hypocritical fervour. Then Henry lets out the great news — that has had something to do with his merciful change of mind — the birth of a babe to his lovely queen; she is immediately to be baptized, and Canterbury shall stand godfather. The humility of Cranmer shrinks from the honour, but the King insists with a good-humoured jest —

> Come, come, my lord, you'ld spare your spoons!

[1] V. iii. 114.

So the action passes on to its crowning pageant — the christening of the babe Elizabeth, with Cranmer as chief figure in the ceremony. A yet higher point of exaltation is reached by him. Old age is prophetic, and, the religious ceremony concluded, Cranmer is seized with a sudden inspiration,[1] beholding in vision the greatness reserved for the babe just made a Christian: he bursts into an "oracle of comfort." She shall be

> A pattern to all princes living with her,
> And all that shall succeed: Saba was never
> More covetous of wisdom and fair virtue
> Than this pure soul shall be: all princely graces,
> That mould up such a mighty piece as this is,
> With all the virtues that attend the good,
> Shall still be doubled on her: truth shall nurse her,
> Holy and heavenly thoughts still counsel her:
> She shall be loved and fear'd: her own shall bless her;
> Her foes shake like a field of beaten corn,
> And hang their heads with sorrow: good grows with her:
> In her days every man shall eat in safety,
> Under his own vine, what he plants, and sing
> The merry songs of peace to all his neighbours:
> God shall be truly known; and those about her
> From her shall read the perfect ways of honour,
> And by those claim their greatness, not by blood.
> Nor shall this peace sleep with her: but, as when
> The bird of wonder dies, the maiden phœnix,
> Her ashes new create another heir
> As great in admiration as herself;
> So shall she leave her blessedness to one,
> When heaven shall call her from this cloud of darkness,
> Who from the sacred ashes of her honour
> Shall star-like rise, as great in fame as she was,
> And so stand fix'd.

In this long outpouring we have the compliment essential to every court pageant, and so the Mask-Tragedy of *Henry the Eighth* is ready for the fall of the curtain.

[1] V. v, from 15.

The antithesis of the outer and the inner life, so notably emphasised in this play of *Henry the Eighth*, makes the last of what I am treating as the root ideas in the moral system of the Shakespearean drama. The world created by Shakespeare is profoundly ethical; no interest underlying it is greater than the interest of human character. In some cases the harmony in a single design of all that appears, which is the plot of the play and mirrors the providence of the actual world, seems to have for its dominant purpose nothing more than the display of some type of character; what happens in *Henry the Fifth* is not a rise or fall of the hero, but serves to display a perfect heroism; if there is development, it is the development of the moon through its phases, not variation of the thing, but variation of the light that allows it to be seen. Or, the field of view extends to exhibit alike human character and the world of providential government in which it moves. In one play the microcosm of providence is viewed on its side of retribution; the deed is seen forever returning rhythmically upon the doer, no fate appears that has not been forged by character. In another play the plot opens up the strange work of providence which we call accident, the providence by which character is mysteriously denied its natural fate; the emotions of the spectator are turned into another channel than retribution, and pure sympathy finds its discipline. Yet again, we turn to behold the providence of mercy; the forces which make for restoration, alike in character and in fate, are displayed at their work, and skilful fashioning of plot is permitted to clothe with beauty the lofty idea of redemption. But more than all this is required. There are two spheres, not one, in which providence may be displayed, the life without and the life within; and that which is ruin in the one may be recognised as triumph in the other. This last of the root ideas of Shakespeare seems to harmonise all the rest. In the light of this distinction between outer and inner life there is a sense in which it becomes true that the deed always returns upon the doer: he who has done an unjust deed has so far become unjust in himself, however in the world without his injustice may

bring him glory and security. And though, in the world of the external, the long career of righteousness has ended in ruin and shame, it is not the less true that the character has wrought out its natural fate, for the inner life knows the righteousness as itself the highest prosperity.

BOOK II

SHAKESPEARE'S WORLD IN ITS MORAL COMPLEXITY

CHAPTER VI: The Outer and Inner in Application to Roman Life

CHAPTER VII: Moral Problems Dramatised

CHAPTER VIII: Comedy as Life in Equilibrium

CHAPTER IX: Tragedy as Equilibrium Overthrown

CHAPTER X: The Moral Significance of Humour

VI

THE OUTER AND INNER IN APPLICATION TO ROMAN LIFE

We have seen that among the root ideas in the moral system of Shakespeare is to be reckoned the antithesis of the outer and the inner life, interest in the common world and in the life of personality. In the preceding chapter we have traced a very simple application of this idea, in a region of human life where the personages affected do not differ greatly from one another, nor from us who study them. If the field of view be extended, to take in a wider variety and greater complexity of humanity, the antithesis of inner and outer may be expected to appear in diverse and more difficult forms. I desire in the present chapter to apply it to the Roman life of antiquity, as presented in the three plays of *Coriolanus*, *Julius Cæsar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*.

A wide gulf of difference, both in thought and feeling, separates what we call modern times from antiquity; the difference is often overlooked, and, as it appears to me, modern readers are led into serious misinterpretations of ancient character and action. The difficulty of the discussion is increased by the fact that the same terms are applied to ancient and to modern life, but the words are used in different senses. Thus in reference to any age we may speak of subordinating the individual to the state. But a modern writer means by 'the state' the sum of the individuals composing it; his subordination of the individual puts in another form the principle of seeking the greatest good of the greatest number. An ancient thinker, on the contrary, might understand 'the state' as an entity in itself: the abstract thing, government. We should to-day assume as a matter of course, that any government must exist in the interest of the people governed; the ancient philoso-

pher might reverse the proposition, and tacitly assume that those who were being governed existed for the sake of the government. Such an attitude of mind is well illustrated in Plato's ideal republic, which abolishes, not only private property, but even marriage, because children born without family ties will be more completely at the service of the state. Again, ancient and modern statesmen have alike exalted 'liberty': but the word is used by the two in opposite senses. With us, liberty means the freedom of the individual, so far as may be, from state control. In ancient politics liberty meant the freedom of the state from being controlled by individuals. An example of the latter conception is the Athenian institution of ostracism, which was not banishment inflicted as a punishment by judicial process, but an authoritative request to retire from the country; the citizen voting to ostracise Aristides "because he did not like to hear him called the Just," illustrates the spirit of the institution, that the state has a right to be free from a personal influence, even when that influence is wholly good.

This difference of political conceptions is part of a wider difference between ancient and modern thought, running on the same dividing line of the community and the individual. A man of to-day may feel that he has got down to the bed rock of practical philosophy in proclaiming the rights of man; to the ancient mind the rights of society were still more fundamental. Hence the absurdity of such visionary theorising as Rousseau's social contract: in the sober light of history it appears that the society which it is desired to explain was anterior to the conception of individual rights assumed for its origin. Property, again, reflects the difference between ancient and modern thinking: what seems so simple to us, the idea of a man's owning a piece of land, was a late conception in ancient life, slowly elaborated from the original idea that land belonged to the community. In the field of literature also confusion has arisen from intruding the modern idea of individuality into the social activities of antiquity. The modern mind associates a particular 'author' with a particular piece of literature, and protects by copyright laws the author's 'property' in what

he produces; it is slow to grasp the totally different conditions of oral poetry, when production was a function of the minstrel order as a whole, without connection between individual poet and individual poem; when 'Homer' would be a name, not for a man, but for a mass of floating ballads, the product of many poets through many generations, subsequently worked up by a single mind into our *Iliad* or *Odyssey*. Even in the sphere of religion we may trace the difference between the earlier and the later attitude of mind. In the religious development comprised within the limits of the Bible we see first a national religion, God in covenant with Israel; at a much later stage comes into prominence another conception, and Jeremiah speaks of the new covenant written on the hearts of individual worshippers.

In these diverse conceptions of life, centering respectively around the state and the individual, we have the antithesis of the life without and the life within reappearing in a different form. In the simplicity of ancient life man differed little from man, or men fell into well marked classes; the earliest institutions rested on the idea of these classifications, or of society as a whole. But with advancing civilisation came increasing variation between the characters of different persons; consciousness of difference from others must give emphasis to the sense of individuality as a whole; quickened sense of individuality in a man's self carries with it sympathy with and insight into individuality in others. Thus with the progress of time individuality comes to assert itself as a rival ideal to the ideal of the state. This makes an interesting basis on which to analyse the three Roman plays of Shakespeare: they stand for us as representing three different points along the line of political evolution, in which the pure ideal of the state and the life without is gradually yielding before the growing prominence of the inner life and the claims of individuals.

The play of *Coriolanus* is pitched at an early point in the line of historical development: the only ideal here is the ideal of the state, the common life to which all actions must have their refer-

ence, while the claims of individuality have just begun to appear as a disturbing force. Thus in relation to this story the antithesis of the outer and inner life becomes the antithesis between pure political principle and that concession to the individual which we call compromise.

On the surface of the story we have contests of parties, patricians and plebeians. But these are not, like the Whig and Tory, Democrat and Republican, of modern times, organisations contending for different plans of reaching a common good. For both patricians and plebeians there is but one ideal, that of service to the state; and to this ideal the patrician party is wholly devoted, as typified by such leaders as Titus Lartius — ready to lean on one crutch and fight the enemy with the other[1] — or the incomparable Coriolanus. It is true that at one excited point of the conflict a representative of the plebeians — as if with a sudden insight into the thought of future ages — cries out[2]:

What is the city but the people?

But in the action of the play this comes only as a wild extravagance, and no representation of the motives actually at work. The plebeians as they appear in this drama have no ideal of their own to set up, but are defaulters to the conception of duty recognised by all. They "cannot rule, nor ever will be ruled"; their "affections are a sick man's appetite, who desires most that which would increase his evil." What their scornful opponents say of them harmonises with what their actions show in the story, as we see the mob stealing away at the first word of war, and even those who are equal to fighting the Volscians diverted from valour by the first chance of petty spoil.[3] This single political virtue to which part of the people are untrue is the very point of the famous Fable of the Belly and Members, with which Menenius strikes the key-note of the whole play.[4] The belly and the members are not coördinate limbs of the body; the drift of the parable is that

[1] I. i. 246.
[2] III. i. 199.
[3] Compare III. i. 40; I. i. 181; I. i. 255, stage direction; I. v.
[4] I. i, from 92.

the belly is the state, and the members, so far as they are not serving the belly, are disturbers of the general health of the physical or political body.

Men. Your most grave belly was deliberate,
Not rash like his accusers, and thus answer'd:
'True is it, my incorporate friends,' quoth he,
'That I receive the general food at first,
Which you do live upon; and fit it is,
Because I am the store-house and the shop
Of the whole body: but, if you do remember,
I send it through the rivers of your blood,
Even to the court, the heart, to the seat o' the brain;
And, through the cranks and offices of man,
The strongest nerves and most inferior veins
From me receive that natural competency
Whereby they live: and though that all at once,
You, my good friends,' — this says the belly, mark me, —
First Cit. Ay, sir; well, well.
Men. 'Though all at once cannot
See what I deliver out to each,
Yet I can make my audit up, that all
From me do back receive the flour of all,
And leave me but the bran.' What say you to't?
First Cit. It was an answer: how apply you this?
Men. The senators of Rome are this good belly,
And you the mutinous members: for examine
Their counsels and their cares, digest things rightly
Touching the weal o' the common, you shall find
No public benefit which you receive
But it proceeds or comes from them to you
And no way from yourselves. What do you think,
You, the great toe of this assembly?
First Cit. I the great toe! why the great toe?
Men. For that, being one o' the lowest, basest, poorest,
Of this most wise rebellion, thou go'st foremost.

What then is the position of the plebeian party in the conflict? They have no political ideal to set up; what they put forward is

individuality reduced to its lowest terms — the bare right to exist. It is precisely the story of the petty defaulter and the grand minister of France: the defaulter makes his plea, *Il faut vivre;* to which the chancellor answers loftily, *Monsieur, je n'en vois pas la nécessité.* So the plebeian mob:

> They said they were an-hungry; sigh'd forth proverbs,
> That hunger broke stone walls, that dogs must eat,
> That meat was made for mouths, that the gods sent not
> Corn for the rich men only.[1]

The claims of the individual life are not exalted into an ideal; they have come in as a disturbing force to the common ideal of the state and its service. The exact situation is that, at the opening of the action, the patricians have compromised with this disturbing claim of the individual; they have ordered distributions of corn as gratuities and not for service done;[2] worse than this, they have created tribunes of the people,[3] a perpetual mouthpiece for popular claims, and thus a disturbing force to the old single ideal of the state has been admitted within the constitution itself. Nothing but conflict can ensue; and at the height of the conflict the speech of Coriolanus — continued amid interruptions from both sides[4] — brings out clearly how this is a conflict between pure political principle, as Rome had understood it, and compromising recognition of popular demands.

> O good, but most unwise patricians! why,
> You grave but reckless senators, have you thus
> Given Hydra here to choose an officer,
> That with his peremptory 'shall,' being but
> The horn and noise o' the monster's, wants not spirit
> To say he'll turn your current in a ditch,
> And make your channel his? . . . My soul aches
> To know, when two authorities are up,
> Neither supreme, how soon confusion
> May enter 'twixt the gap of both and take

[1] I. i. 209.
[2] III. i, from 120.
[3] I. i. 219.
[4] III. i. 91–171.

The one by the other. . . . They know the corn
Was not our recompense, resting well assured
They ne'er did service for't: being press'd to the war,
Even when the navel of the state was touch'd,
They would not thread the gates. This kind of service
Did not deserve corn gratis: being i' the war,
Their mutinies and revolts, wherein they show'd
Most valour, spoke not for them: the accusation
Which they have often made against the senate,
All cause unborn, could never be the motive
Of our so frank donation. Well, what then?
How shall this bisson multitude digest
The senate's courtesy? Let deeds express
What's like to be their words: 'We did request it;
We are the greater poll, and in true fear
They gave us our demands.' Therefore, beseech you,—
You, that will be less fearful than discreet;
That love the fundamental part of state
More than you doubt the change on't; that prefer
A noble life before a long, and wish
To jump a body with a dangerous physic
That's sure of death without it,—at once pluck out
The multitudinous tongue; let them not lick
The sweet which is their poison. . . . In a rebellion,
When what's not meet, but what must be, was law,
Then were they chosen: in a better hour,
Let what is meet be said it must be meet,
And throw their power i' the dust.

Around this central idea of principle in conflict with compromise the characters of the drama naturally arrange themselves. Coriolanus himself embodies absolute devotion to principle, the one ideal of service to the state. Panegyric relates prodigies of valour, marvels of self-exposure against odds, which have made Coriolanus the grand hero of the age.[1] Yet this is not the fire-eating battle passion of a Hotspur; Coriolanus hates praise, and would rather have his wounds to heal again than hear how he got them.[2]

[1] *E.g.* II. ii, from 86. [2] II. ii. 73, 79.

> I have done
> As you have done; that's what I can: induced
> As you have been; that's for my country:
> He that has but effected his good will
> Hath overta'en mine act.[1]

Still less can this warrior tolerate reward.

> He covets less
> Than misery itself would give; rewards
> His deeds with doing them, and is content
> To spend the time to end it.[2]

The deeds are not actuated by personal ambition: Coriolanus has to be pushed forward by the patricians to office, and "would rather be their servant in his own way than sway with them in theirs."[3] From first to last no personal motive can be detected in Coriolanus: he is actuated solely by the passion for service. Hence the injustice of the common interpretation, which in this drama sees pride and its fall. The mistake is an easy one, for 'proud' is the epithet for Coriolanus that is heard throughout the story, and even in his own mother's mouth.

> Thy valiantness was mine, thou suck'dst it from me,
> But owe thy pride thyself.[4]

Moreover, what we see of outward demeanour in Coriolanus is just the flash of scorn and mocking taunt with which pride expresses itself. Yet, if we force ourselves to do justice to this hero, we must acquit him of the charge of pride. Scorn is the expression of righteous indignation, as well as of personal haughtiness; the honest workman, of the type of Adam Bede, has nothing but scorn for the feckless makeshift throwing down his work the moment the bell rings; and this on a larger scale makes the magnificent warrior in his attitude to the plebeians who claim feed and shirk duty. The mother of Coriolanus, we shall see, has an ideal different from

[1] I. ix. 15.
[2] II. ii. 130.
[3] II. i. 219.
[4] III. ii. 129.

that of her son; moreover, she is infected with the spirit of compromise around her, and fails to appreciate the pure stand for principle. Apart from this contempt for half service, where is the pride of Coriolanus to be found? It is not personal pride: for this hero of the battlefield cordially and without a moment's hesitation places himself under command of an inferior; his enemies the tribunes note this, and wonder how "his insolence can brook to be commanded under Cominius."[1] It is not the aristocratic pride that contemns the people as such: this is suggested by an incident in which the people can be seen apart from the plebeian defaulters.[2]

Cor. The gods begin to mock me. I, that now
Refused most princely gifts, am bound to beg
Of my lord general.
Com. Take't; 'tis yours. What is't?
Cor. I sometime lay here in Corioli
At a poor man's house; he used me kindly:
He cried to me; I saw him prisoner:
But then Aufidius was within my view,
And wrath o'erwhelm'd my pity: I request you
To give my poor host freedom.

The "noble carelessness" whether the populace love or hate him, the bitter contempt he pours out, are in Coriolanus but the expression of the whole-souled devotion to principle, as against the universal tendency to temporise which he sees around him.[3] His ideal may be the opposite of our modern humanity; but jus-

[1] I. i. 265. [2] I. ix. 79.

[3] The nearest approach to aristocratic contempt is the gibe (in II. iii. 67): "Bid them wash their faces and keep their teeth clean." But this is directed, not against the people, but against the insincere flattery of the people which is being urged on Coriolanus. The conversation of the two officers (in II. ii) is very much to the point. The first officer puts the common view that "to affect the malice and displeasure of the people is as bad as . . . to flatter them for their love"; the second officer points out that Coriolanus does neither, but fixes his regards always upon "the country," that is, the state. And at the end the first officer seems to be convinced.

tice forces us to recognise the purest type of a soul in which all personal aims have been merged in the thought of service.

> His nature is too noble for the world:
> He would not flatter Neptune for his trident,
> Or Jove for his power to thunder. His heart's his mouth:
> What his breast forges, that his tongue must vent.[1]

It is Coriolanus alone who typifies purity of principle: all the other personages in some form or other exhibit the spirit of compromise. The tribunes, as we have seen, simply give expression to the compromising claims of the individual; their office has been created in a moment of panic, by a patrician party who shrink from carrying their political ideal to its logical conclusion. Aufidius up to a certain point keeps step with Coriolanus: each in his respective state is the absolute devotee of public service, and each recognises the perfection of the other.[2] But at last the honour of Aufidius begins to be obscured.

> Mine emulation
> Hath not that honour in't it had; for where
> I thought to crush him in an equal force,
> True sword to sword, I'll potch at him some way,
> Or wrath or craft may get him.[3]

Personal rivalry has here come in as a disturbing force to principle; and, although for a while Aufidius's honour flames up to its full brightness when Coriolanus surrenders to him, and he delights to exalt his former rival to the command over himself,[4] yet Aufidius proves unequal to the strain, and yields to the base envy which plots against a personality acknowledged to be the great bulwark of the Volscian state.[5] Even Volumnia must be referred to the same side of the antithesis. In the earlier part of the play not only does the mother of Coriolanus seem the equal of her heroic son, but she is put forward as the fount from which has flowed his public virtue. But as the crisis manifests itself, and the career

[1] III. i. 255.
[2] *E.g.* I. i. 232–40; I. iii. 34; I. viii; IV. v, from 108.
[3] I. x. 12. [4] IV. v. 142, 207. [5] IV. vii.

and even safety of Coriolanus are at stake, Volumnia begins to draw apart from the pure principle of her son, and speaks the language of compromise, bidding him dissemble, and introduce into Rome itself the arts with which he fights Rome's foes.[1]

> If it be honour in your wars to seem
> The same you are not, which, for your best ends,
> You adopt your policy, how is it less or worse,
> That it shall hold companionship in peace
> With honour, as in war, since that to both
> It stands in like request? . . . It lies you on to speak
> To the people; not by your own instruction,
> Nor by the matter which your heart prompts you,
> But with such words that are but rooted in
> Your tongue, though but bastards and syllables
> Of no allowance to your bosom's truth.
> Now, this no more dishonours you at all
> Than to take in a town with gentle words,
> Which else would put you to your fortune and
> The hazard of much blood.
> I would dissemble with my nature, where
> My fortunes and my friends at stake required
> I should do so in honour.

The compromising spirit so clearly described underlies Volumnia's action in the final crisis. The sympathies of the modern reader are with her, for she represents the modern ideal of patriotism. But, once the ancient point of view has been caught, it must be admitted that from this standpoint even patriotism is a compromise with principle; it is not pure devotion to the ideal of government, but devotion to that particular government with which the individual has been connected by the accident of birth. Coriolanus, as a servant of the Volscian state, exhibits the same absolute fidelity to the public service at all personal cost which once he had cherished for Rome. Volumnia on her knees before the conqueror appears as a force disturbing faithful service by motives of sentiment and passion.

[1] III. ii, from 41.

The action of the play, no less than the character-drawing, is founded on this antithesis of principle and compromise, the state and the individual. The entanglement of the plot lies essentially in the opening situation, and not until the fifth act in the conduct of the hero. In the earlier part all the action serves to display the grandeur of the principal figure; it is not simply service, but magnificent achievement, at the price of infinite self-devotion, with Coriolanus rejecting all reward, and resisting the honours all are thrusting upon him, up to the point where further resistance would be exalting his personal feeling against the public voice.[1] The patricians insist upon office for their hero: again he resists and prefers to be servant only of the state, once more pushing his resistance to the furthest point to which the individual may oppose the public will.[2] But just here appears the entanglement which the compromising spirit of the time has admitted into the constitution of Rome; popular claims have won recognition in election to office, and the candidate's gown is the outward symbol of two incompatible things in conflict, the patrician ideal of the state and the temporising courtship of individual plebeians. It may be urged that Coriolanus plays his part as candidate badly; the tribunes point out "with what contempt he wore the humble weed." But what else could be expected from the situation created against his will for Coriolanus? Principle itself has been arrayed in the garment of compromise.

> Why in this woolvish toge should I stand here,
> To beg of Hob and Dick, that do appear,
> Their needless vouches? Custom calls me to't:
> What custom wills, in all things should we do't,
> The dust on antique time would lie unswept,
> And mountainous error be too highly heap'd
> For truth to o'er-peer. Rather than fool it so,
> Let the high office and the honour go
> To one that would do thus.[3]

[1] I. ix. 53–60. [2] II. i. 218; II. ii, from 139; III. ii.
[3] II. iii. 122.

The latent conflict works itself out to a sharp crisis: Coriolanus, as we have seen, makes one more stand for pure principle, and would sweep away at a stroke all that has allowed popular claims to interfere with the ideal of the state and the public service. It has become a question of brute force: the hero of the patricians is worsted and receives sentence of banishment. At this height of the struggle[1] comes the magnificent stroke with which Shakespeare, in a single flash, presents the whole issue, as Coriolanus hurls against the hubbub of Rome's confusion the answering taunt —

I BANISH YOU!

Not Rome, but Rome in the hands of the tribunes, is thus addressed: the state has committed political suicide, self-surrendered to the forces that disintegrate it, before Coriolanus abandons it. The principle at stake is not patriotism, which roots the individual to the soil where he has grown; dismissed from the state it has so gloriously served, the life of service is free to transfer itself to another. Coriolanus becomes a Volscian, and, with no popular turbulence to interfere, leads the Volscian armies to victory. This may be called revenge, but it is no less service; and the service is as flawless as in the old days.

> *Cor.* Wife, mother, child, I know not. My affairs
> Are servanted to others: though I owe
> My revenge properly, my remission lies
> In Volscian breasts.[2]

A second crisis of the action is made where mother, wife, and child kneel in behalf of Rome before the conqueror.[3] The whole force of kinship and patriotism is concentrated in one motive. But, from the ancient standpoint, kinship and patriotism are an exalted form of individuality: the two sides of the antithesis, the state and the individual, are seen in full conflict. The situation has been created which is so dear to the ancient drama — two

[1] III. iii, from 120. [2] V. ii. 88, and whole scene. [3] V. iii.

opposing moral forces meet in the same personage: the tragic sequel is that the personage is crushed. Volumnia does not see this, and speaks of reconciliation.[1]

> *Vol.* If it were so that our request did tend
> To save the Romans, thereby to destroy
> The Volsces whom you serve, you might condemn us,
> As poisonous of your honour: no; our suit
> Is, that you reconcile them.

But her son sees more clearly, and realises the bitter irony of the situation.[2]

> *Cor.* (*After holding her by the hand, silent*) O mother, mother!
> What have you done? Behold, the heavens do ope,
> The gods look down, and this unnatural scene
> They laugh at. O my mother, mother! O!
> You have won a happy victory to Rome;
> But, for your son, — believe it, O, believe it,
> Most dangerously you have with him prevail'd,
> If not most mortal to him. But let it come.

Coriolanus understands that a point has been reached where he must make a final choice between principle and compromise: the embodiment of principle chooses compromise, but he knows he is choosing ruin for himself.

There is yet another turning-point before the action of the play is complete. Coriolanus leading the Volscian army away from Rome gives scope for nemesis: the devotee of principle has surrendered to compromise, and the ruin that follows comes as retribution. But all the while there is by the side of the hero another personality, in which there has been a far worse surrender of honour; Aufidius has yielded to personal rivalry and base envy, and, by slander and secret plotting, at last strikes down Coriolanus on his return.[3] Instantly, to the spectator of the story, nemesis has given place to pathos; the hero falls a wronged man, and his

[1] V. iii. 132. [2] V. iii. 182. [3] V. vi.

error is forgotten in the thought of his heroism. Even Aufidius has a pang of compunction:

> My rage is gone,
> And I am struck with sorrow.[1]

And it is a lord of the Volscians who speaks the fitting epitaph for the supreme representative of old Roman honour:

> Mourn you for him: let him be regarded
> As the most noble corse that ever herald
> Did follow to his urn.[2]

When we come to the play of *Julius Cæsar*, we are met with the difficulty that Shakespeare has here drawn the characters with such subtlety, and so delicately balanced the motives, that various impressions are left; different readers find themselves at the close partisans of Cæsar or Brutus. I have elsewhere analysed the drama at length;[3] in the present chapter I must be content with stating results. For myself, I am unable to see any personal or corrupt motive either in Cæsar or in his great opponent. Brutus, at immense cost to himself, slays the friend he loves in order, as he thinks, to save the country he loves better. And Cæsar is seeking absolute power — which the constitution of Rome recognised to some extent in its dictatorship — simply with the view of doing for Rome itself the service of organisation he had done outside for the Roman empire. The immediate point is to survey the drama from the standpoint of the outer and the inner life.

The conflict between the pure ideal of the state and the growing force of individuality, which the drama of *Coriolanus* exhibited in its first beginnings, is presented by *Julius Cæsar* in a late stage of development. Generations of time have separated the age of the one story from that of the other, and all the while the silent progress of human nature has carried with it the expansion

[1] V. vi. 148. [2] V. vi. 143.
[3] In my *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist:* Chapters VIII and IX.

of the individual life; the two sides of the antithesis are now to meet on equal terms. Rome is still a republic, and the republican ideal is a mighty force. But alike those who cherish this ideal, and those who oppose it, have been secretly moulded by the growth of individual character.

The multitude, swayed hither and thither by every orator, are still the expression of individuality in its lowest form; but with a difference — they are all-powerful. The question that seemed a paradox in *Coriolanus* —

> What is the city, but the people? —

has now won an affirmative answer: all look to the people as the source of rule. The magnificent Cæsar can obtain his dominion only if he wins the popular voice; to the mob the cause of the conspirators must appeal for its justification.

The leading personages of the story are interesting for the balance in each of the outer and inner life. Especially peculiar is the position of Cæsar himself. Advancing individuality implies increasing differentiation; among the infinite possible forms that personality may take, we may expect to find at last an individuality taking the form of service, of entire devotion to the ideal of the state. So it is with the Cæsar of this play. He is Coriolanus on a larger moral scale: there is here not the simple valour which found complete expression in a Volscian war, but an all-round personality, with infinite resources of intellect and loftiness of moral power, the whole concentrated in the government of men and the founding of empire for Rome. But this Cæsar has no inner life: that is to say, when he is seen apart from service to the state he exhibits, not wrongness, but weakness. His foes read him as "superstitious"; he dreads — to his own surprise — the subtle-souled Cassius; on the subtle-souled Antony he leans for support. And, when the great ruler of men seeks to adapt himself to the individualities of a mob, he finds himself bewildered, vacillating, and without resource. Brutus, who inherits from his family high-souled devotion to the state, has no less a strong development of his

individuality; it is seen in his devotion to philosophy and music, in his sympathy with the delicate spirit of Portia, and his deep friendship for Cæsar. But the inner life is held down in Brutus by sheer force of stoicism, the religion that professes to crush out personality; by such self-suppression he is calm before the raging mob, and insists to Cassius upon minutiæ of business all the while that he is concealing the blow of bereavement that has taken from him his Portia. Cassius again is a strange mixture. At first it would seem as if this machine politician and conspirator was wholly summed up in the life without, in devotion to the republican cause. But when we inquire what exactly is the cause Cassius is serving, we find this to be, not public life as it appears outwardly, but a fanatic's idealised equality, an abstract impossibility, such equality as can exist only in an individual's dreaming. He sounds the names[1] 'Cæsar,' 'Brutus,' and insists that the personalities must be as mechanically equal as the sounds; all the difference between man and man made by genius and achievement he ignores; paradoxically, his individuality shows itself in a theory that objects to individuality even when it has taken the form of service to the state. In Antony, finally, as in the rest, individual character has been strongly developed, and he can thus play with the individualities that make up a mob. But he is also, in the present drama, a zealous servant of the state; for at this juncture, his personal interests and the deliverance of Rome from the conspirators move in one and the same path.

The action of the play, no less than the characters, turns upon the antithesis between the state and the individual. The exact issue is seen where Brutus in his deep ponderings pronounces Cæsar an innocent man, yet resolves to slay him for the possibilities that might be.[2] Justice to the innocent is the supreme claim of the individual: it is here sacrificed to policy, a claim of the state. The irony of events brings a sequel, in which this

[1] I. ii. 142.

[2] II. i: the use of the word *affections* in contrast with *reason* (line 20) just points to the antithesis of private and public motives.

policy of the conspiracy is brought to its ruin by the force of outraged individuality, and Brutus, ere he dies, recognises that Julius Cæsar is mighty after his death.[1] In the moment of triumph the conspirators made their claim to be —

> The men that gave their country LIBERTY.

Their conception of 'liberty' was to free Rome from a Julius Cæsar, seeking power for Rome's sake: the issue of their action was to deliver Rome to an Antony and an Octavius, seeking power only for themselves.

Not a long course of years, but a sudden revolution, separates the third play of the trilogy from the second. Mob rule as an expression of unbridled individuality has been allowed the free play which has led naturally to its own ruin.

> This common body,
> Like to a vagabond flag upon the stream,
> Goes to and back, lackeying the varying tide,
> To rot itself with motion.[2]

The irresistible advance of popular claims has eventuated in empire; the end of the conflict between the state and the individual is that an individual has now become the state. It might seem, indeed, that in the present case there were two individualities, or at first three: the Roman world is in the hands of a triumvirate. But this is only appearance. Lepidus is never anything but a figurehead.[3] Octavius Cæsar is a power, destined in the final issue to be a dominant power; but at the opening of the play Cæsar is no power as against Antony. Cæsar loses hearts where he gets money;[4] on the testimony of the common enemy Antony's soldiership "is twice the other twain";[5] history is in the drama of Shakespeare so moulded as to imply that the empire of the world is Antony's, if he chooses to grasp it.

[1] V. iii. 94.
[2] *Antony and Cleopatra*, I. iv. 44.
[3] II. i. 16; II. vii; III. v. Compare *Julius Cæsar:* IV. i, from 12.
[4] *Antony and Cleopatra*, II. i. 13.
[5] II. i. 34.

But why this "if"? What should hold back Antony from the universal dominion which it is his to command? We have seen, in the play of *Julius Cæsar*, how the two sides of Antony's nature are there in harmony. He has a complex individuality in touch with every element of human nature; but he brings this individuality of his into public life, and, in the storms of revolution, this is the means by which he conquers all hearts and wins supremacy. But in the present play a new force has emerged, which touches the individual nature of Antony, and sways it in a direction away from the public career inviting him. This force is Cleopatra.

Even Shakespeare's power of painting human nature has exhibited no greater feat than his Cleopatra. We cannot sketch her character, for character is just what she has not. Cleopatra is not a woman, but a bundle of all womanly qualities tied together by the string of pure caprice. She does not appear as a human soul, but as a "great fairy," an enchantress; it is her "magic" that has ruined Antony.[1] She is addressed as one —

> Whom every thing becomes, to chide, to laugh,
> To weep; whose every passion fully strives
> To make itself, in thee, fair and admired![2]

The humorist of the play sees in her something elemental.

> *Antony.* She is cunning past man's thought.
> *Enobarbus.* Alack, sir, no; her passions are made of nothing but the finest part of pure love: we cannot call her winds and waters sighs and tears; they are greater storms and tempests than almanacs can report: this cannot be cunning in her; if it be, she makes a shower of rain as well as Jove.[3]

Whatever charms of person or arts of wooing other women may have, Cleopatra has them all: but as readily can she use their opposites.

> I saw her once
> Hop forty paces through the public street;
> And having lost her breath, she spoke, and panted,

[1] IV. viii. 12; I. ii. 132; III. x. 19. [2] I. i. 49. [3] I. ii. 150.

> That she did make defect perfection,
> And, breathless, power breathe forth. . . .
> Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale
> Her infinite variety: other women cloy
> The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry
> Where most she satisfies: for vilest things
> Become themselves in her.[1]

She can enter into every passing mood of Antony, breathing out naval heroism when he inclines to fight by sea;[2] or, at will, Cleopatra can entice by mocking.

> If you find him sad,
> Say I am dancing; if in mirth, report
> That I am sudden sick.[3]

She can sail close to the wind, and irritate the compunction Antony feels for the noble wife he has forsaken.

> Why should I think you can be mine and true,
> Though you in swearing shake the throned gods,
> Who have been false to Fulvia?[4]

Arbitrary individuality is incarnate in Cleopatra: and this is just what has conquered Antony. He himself amongst men had been the myriad-sided. His oration, in which he could catch every fluctuating passion of the mob, and draw them all into whatever harmony he chose, was like the virtuoso exhibiting the powers of his instrument; but when Cleopatra comes in, it is as if the instrument were to play the virtuoso. The great soul, that can sway men's passions in any direction he pleases, is himself adrift in a sea of feminine passions, that knows no shore of a responsible soul.

Thus the antithesis of the world without and the world within, instead of disappearing, has in the third play of the trilogy come back in a new form. The rivalry of the state and the individual is now to be seen within the personality of Antony himself: it is

[1] II. ii. 233. [2] III. vii, from 29. [3] I. iii. 3. [4] I. iii. 27.

the conflict, for Antony, between his public and his private life. This one individual, if only he chooses to give himself to public affairs, has world empire in his grasp. But it is also possible for Antony to find his world elsewhere.

> *Ant.* Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch
> Of the ranged empire fall! Here is my space.
> Kingdoms are clay: our dungy earth alike
> Feeds beast as man: the nobleness of life
> Is to do thus; when such a mutual pair [*Embracing.*
> And such a twain can do't, in which I bind,
> On pain of punishment, the world to weet
> We stand up peerless.[1]

For this competing public and private life of Antony there is an external measure in the movement of the play: Antony conjoining himself with Cæsar is the life rising to public duty; Antony inclining to Cleopatra is the life falling to private passion.

The action of the drama, viewed from this standpoint, falls into five well-marked stages.[2]

1. A portion of the poem displays the opening situation: Antony, under the spell of Cleopatra, is neglecting public for private life. His colleagues in Rome are merely waiting; and this is the situation as they see it.[3]

> From Alexandria
> This is the news: he fishes, drinks and wastes
> The lamps of night in revel: is not more manlike
> Than Cleopatra, nor the queen of Ptolemy
> More womanly than he: hardly gave audience, or
> Vouchsafed to think he had partners.... Let us grant, it is not
> Amiss to tumble on the bed of Ptolemy,
> To give a kingdom for a mirth, to sit
> And keep the turn of tippling with a slave,

[1] I. i. 33.

[2] Of course these stages cannot be separated into acts and scenes. Thus, Antony in Egypt passes in I. ii from the first to the second stage; while in I. iv they are in Rome still discussing the opening situation.

[3] I. iv.

To reel the streets at noon and stand the buffet
With knaves that smell of sweat: . . . yet must Antony
No way excuse his soils, when we do bear
So great weight in his lightness. If he fill'd
His vacancy with his voluptuousness,
Full surfeits, and the dryness of his bones,
Call on him for't: but to confound such time
That drums him from his sport, and speaks as loud
As his own state and ours, — 'tis to be chid
As we rate boys, who, being mature in knowledge,
Pawn their experience to their present pleasure,
And so rebel to judgement.

Meanwhile, with no power to check, piracy is infesting the seas and making inroads upon land; Parthian conquests are extending further and further westwards; Pompey is coming into view as a new centre for the popular turbulence to gather about. Messengers bring tidings to Antony[1]; and at last he brings himself to realise the situation.

O, then we bring forth weeds
When our quick minds lie still; and our ills told us
Is as our earing . . .
These strong Egyptian fetters I must break,
Or lose myself in dotage . . .
Ten thousand harms, more than the ills I know,
My idleness doth hatch.[2]

2. The shock of Fulvia's death[3] makes the point at which the rise of Antony begins. In the midst of his mirth "a Roman thought has struck him," and his mind opens to take in all that he is letting slip. Cleopatra in vain brings her whole armoury to bear; taunts and tenderness, despair and defiance, succeed one another in quick turns of paradox; she can only end by blessing Antony's departure, and will unpeople Egypt, if necessary, to follow him up with messengers.[4] Pompey and his allies are just

[1] I. ii, from 92.
[2] I. ii. 113.
[3] I. ii. 121.
[4] I. iii, v.

gloating over the certainty that Egyptian seductions will maintain the disunion through which they are strong, when tidings are brought that Antony is every hour expected in Rome.[1] His arrival has changed the whole situation. Where Antony and Cæsar are together, Antony seems to prevail by sheer weight of personality; Cæsar, lately the representative of morality rebuking dissoluteness, sinks into the second place, and all his sharp complaints have the effect of drawing out a moral nature loftier than his own.[2] All seems now to depend upon binding these two powers together; and the sagacity of Agrippa has found a link in Octavia, sister of Cæsar, whom the widower Antony may now take to wife. This policy effected, the empire of the world seems to fall into order again: adequate powers are despatched against the Parthian foe,[3] Pompey and his allies exchange enmity for submission; all seems to settle into peace and hospitable revels.[4] Only the humorist of the story looks ahead far enough to see other possibilities in this marriage of Octavia and Antony.

> He will to his Egyptian dish again: then shall the sighs of Octavia blow the fire up in Cæsar; and, as I said before, that which is the strength of their amity shall prove the immediate author of their variance.[5]

3. The fulfilment of this prophecy is the fall of Antony. Even when the contract was newly made, the arrival of the Soothsayer from Cleopatra brought in for a moment the atmosphere of Egypt, and Antony recognised the hollowness of the reconciliation:

> Though I make this marriage for my peace,
> I' the East my pleasure lies.[6]

When Antony and Cæsar are separated by distance, the divergence increases apace. The unhappy Octavia, who must "pray for both parts," seeks from her husband the task of reconciler.[7]

[1] II. i. [2] II. ii. [3] II. iii. 40. [4] II. vi, vii; III. i. [5] II. vi. 134. [6] II. iii. 39. [7] III. iv.

> The Jove of power make me, most weak, most weak,
> Your reconciler! Wars 'twixt you twain would be
> As if the world should cleave, and that slain men
> Should solder up the rift.

Antony's assent to her mission is only his way of casting her off: when Octavia arrives in Rome all the world knows her shame.[1] Meanwhile the whole east under Antony stands arrayed against Cæsar and the west; to the amazement of Antony, Cæsar advances stage after stage with a celerity passing all belief, and the critical[2] battle is close at hand. Just here is seen that which makes the fall of Antony a distinct stage of the action. In the opening situation Antony was simply neglecting public duty for private gratification: now, he allows the private life to infect the public with its own spirit.

> *Antony.* Canidius, we
> Will fight with him by sea.
> *Cleopatra.* By sea, what else?
> *Canidius.* Why will my lord do so?
> *Antony.* For that he dares us to't.
> *Enobarbus.* So hath my lord dared him to single fight.
> *Canidius.* Ay, and to wage this battle at Pharsalia,
> Where Cæsar fought with Pompey: but these offers,
> Which serve not for his vantage, he shakes off,
> And so should you.
> *Enobarbus.* Your ships are not well mann'd.
> Your mariners are muleters, reapers, people
> Ingross'd by swift impress; in Cæsar's fleet
> Are those that often have 'gainst Pompey fought:
> Their ships are yare, yours, heavy: no disgrace
> Shall fall you for refusing him at sea,
> Being prepared for land.
> *Antony.* By sea, by sea.
> *Enobarbus.* Most worthy sir, you therein throw away
> The absolute soldiership you have by land,
> Distract your army, which doth most consist
> Of war-mark'd footmen, leave unexecuted

[1] III. vi, from 39. [2] So Cæsar seems to think in III. viii.

Your own renowned knowledge, quite forego
The way which promises assurance, and
Give up yourself merely to chance and hazard
From firm security.

Antony. I'll fight at sea.

Cleopatra. I have sixty sails, Cæsar none better.

Antony. Our overplus of shipping will we burn;
And, with the rest full-mann'd, from the head of Actium
Beat the approaching Cæsar.[1]

Mere personal rivalry, and the thought that Cleopatra will look on, inspire Antony with the gambler's passion for risking awful odds, while there is a wise alternative which the whole army implores him to take. The battle follows and Cleopatra is the first to flee; Antony's heart is tied to her rudder strings, and he hurries after her. Only then does Antony wake up to the sense that he has fled before the effeminate Cæsar, and that the battle on which universal empire depends is lost: he knows "he is so lated in the world that he has lost his way forever."[2] Even the gambler's chances are no longer open to him: in vain he challenges Cæsar to decide the contest in single combat; Cæsar would have "the old ruffian know he has many other ways to die."[3] All his followers can read clearly the lesson of their great leader's fall.

Enobarbus. I see men's judgements are
A parcel of their fortunes, and things outward
Do draw the inward quality after them,
To suffer all alike . . . Cæsar, thou hast subdued
His judgement too.[4]

Antony at last realises it to the full.

Ant. When we in our viciousness grow hard —
O misery on't! — the wise gods seel our eyes;
In our own filth drop our clear judgements; make us
Adore our errors; laugh at's, while we strut
To our confusion.[5]

[1] III. vii, from 28.
[2] III. xi. 3.
[3] IV. i. 4.
[4] III. xiii. 31.
[5] III. xiii. 111.

4. The doom of Antony has been sealed, though the struggle continues a while longer. The diminution of the captain's brain, as Enobarbus says, has restored his heart:[1] with supreme outburst of valour Antony fights another battle, and beats the enemy to their beds. A second fight is waged by sea and land: in the crisis of the day the Egyptian fleet deserts bodily to the enemy. Then the fall of Antony is complete: retribution has its full sway when the final stroke has come from Cleopatra. But a fourth stage of the action has become apparent, mingling with the preceding in the scenes of the play:[2] when once the doom of Antony has been assured, nemesis may gradually change to pathos. The hero is plunged in tragic ruin, so far as the outer life is concerned, and the ruin is just recompense; but the inner life has now scope to reveal itself, and the noble personality that is in Antony may rise to its full height amid the fragments of his shattered career. The infatuated commander disappears in the grand soldier; prodigies of valour and generalship are shown, with an army passionately devoted to their great chief. Eros, the personal attendant, slays himself rather than do his sworn duty in lifting his hand against Antony. Enobarbus, at the first sign of the end, had made peace for himself with the enemy: his late master's generosity to the deserter awakens in him a remorse that can only be quenched by death.

> I am alone the villain of the earth,
> And feel I am so most. O Antony,
> Thou mine of bounty, how would'st thou have paid
> My better service, when my turpitude
> Thou dost so crown with gold! . . . I will go seek
> Some ditch wherein to die.

Kingly flashes of just resentment, regardless of helplessness, show the conqueror's advance guard that it is better playing with a lion's whelp than with an old lion dying. Cleopatra, proved a traitor, is cast off; but, when the (false) news of her death seems to vindi-

[1] III. xiii. 195–200.

[2] It affects the whole spirit of Act IV, but appears more especially from Scene xiv.

cate her innocence, the old love for which the world has been lost returns in all its deepness, and this is the end for Antony.

> Unarm, Eros; the long day's task is done,
> And we must sleep . . . From me awhile.
> I will o'ertake thee, Cleopatra, and
> Weep for my pardon. So it must be, for now
> All length is torture: since the torch is out,
> Lie down and stray no farther . . . I come, my queen . . .
> Where souls do couch on flowers, we'll hand in hand,
> And with our sprightly port make the ghosts gaze:
> Dido and her Æneas shall want troops,
> And all the haunt be ours.

It is a Roman climax that Antony should take his life with his own good sword.

> Not Cæsar's valour hath o'erthrown Antony,
> But Antony's hath triumph'd on itself.

But it is a lingering death, and the guards fill the air with clamour.

> *Ant.* Nay, good my fellows, do not please sharp fate
> To grace it with your sorrows: bid that welcome
> Which comes to punish us, and we punish it
> Seeming to bear it lightly.

Before death comes, Cleopatra is known to be living, and the two meet: she, afraid to leave the monument lest she be taken prisoner by Cæsar, he, to the last advising how his love may be secure in treating with the conqueror.

> *Ant.* The miserable change now at my end
> Lament nor sorrow at, but please your thoughts
> In feeding them with those my former fortunes
> Wherein I lived, the greatest prince o' the world,
> The noblest; and do not now basely die,
> Not cowardly put off my helmet to
> My countryman, — a Roman by a Roman
> Valiantly vanquish'd. Now my spirit is going;
> I can no more.

Cæsar and his followers confirm the epitaph.[1]

[1] V. i. 30.

Mæcenas. His taints and honours
Waged equal with him.
Agrippa. A rarer spirit never
Did steer humanity: but you, gods, will give us
Some faults to make us men. Cæsar is touch'd.

5. But yet a further stage is to be seen in the action of this drama.[1] The steady movement of relentless tragedy at last seems to awaken a soul in Cleopatra herself. All the while that Antony has been standing at bay with ruin, and dying all nobleness and love, the Egyptian has been packing cards with the conqueror, ready if needs be to betray her lover. But the actual death of Antony thrills a touch of womanhood into the fairy enchantress of male hearts.

No more, but e'en a woman, and commanded
By such poor passion as the maid that milks
And does the meanest chares . . . All's but naught;
Patience is sottish, and impatience does
Become a dog that's mad: then is it sin
To rush into the secret house of death,
Ere death dare come to us? . . .
We'll bury him; and then, what's brave, what's noble,
Let's do it after the high Roman fashion,
And make death proud to take us.

It is but an imitative virtue which has begun to animate Cleopatra, and it is seen side by side with negotiations by which she tries her false arts on a Cæsar as false as herself. But with growing hopelessness the new thought gains strength.[2]

My desolation does begin to make
A better life. 'Tis paltry to be Cæsar;
Not being Fortune, he's but Fortune's knave,
A minister of her will: and it is great

[1] In the main, Act V; commencing from the death of Antony in IV. xiv.
[2] V. ii.

To do that thing that ends all other deeds;
Which shackles accidents and bolts up change;
Which sleeps, and never palates more the dug,
The beggar's nurse and Cæsar's.

One more negotiation, and attempt to save something out of the wreck, and suddenly Cleopatra finds herself taken prisoner by treachery. Now the outer skin of feminine daintiness in which her wild spirit had ever been wrapped is touched.

This mortal house I'll ruin,
Do Cæsar what he can. Know, sir, that I
Will not wait pinion'd at your master's court,
Nor once be chastised with the sober eye
Of dull Octavia. Shall they hoist me up
And show me to the shouting varletry
Of censuring Rome?

Two motives are combining their full force in Cleopatra: outraged delicacy, and memory of Antony.

I dream'd there was an Emperor Antony . . .
His legs bestrid the ocean: his rear'd arm
Crested the world: his voice was propertied
As all the tuned spheres, and that to friends;
But when he meant to quail and shake the orb,
He was as rattling thunder. For his bounty,
There was no winter in't; and autumn 'twas
That grew the more by reaping.[1]

Unity of purpose becomes ever stronger, and settles into a character for Cleopatra.

Now from head to foot
I am marble-constant; now the fleeting moon
No planet is of mine.[2]

The two elements of this character are reflected in the final scene: she has "pursued conclusions infinite to die," and discovered the

[1] V. ii. 76. [2] V. ii. 240.

delicate wonder of the aspic; yet, in approaching death, she is rising nearer to Antony.

> I have
> Immortal longings in me . . . methinks I hear
> Antony call; I see him rouse himself
> To praise my noble act; I hear him mock
> The luck of Cæsar . . . Husband, I come:
> Now to that name my courage prove my title!
> I am fire and air: my other elements
> I give to baser life.[1]

So, in royal robes and crown, her maidens beside her sharing her fate, Cleopatra finds the stroke of death like a lover's pinch, which hurts and is desired; as sweet as balm, as soft as air. What the Roman conquerors break in to behold is the ideal of Roman constancy imitated in the cold marble of luxurious daintiness.

> She shall be buried by her Antony:
> No grave upon the earth shall clip in it
> A pair so famous. High events as these
> Strike those that make them; and their story is
> No less in pity than his glory which
> Brought them to be lamented.

[1] V. ii, from 283.

VII

MORAL PROBLEMS DRAMATISED

Poetry is the chemistry of human life, and the theatre is the moral laboratory. Just as the physicist supplements observation by experiment, setting up artificial combinations of forces in order that he may watch these working out to a natural issue, so it is the high function of story to initiate some special situation of characters and circumstances pregnant with moral suggestiveness; the course of the story then follows the situation as in the nature of things it unfolds itself and reaches a point of satisfaction, the initial doubt satisfied, the initial perplexity resolved into clearness. The Shakespearean drama abounds in these moral problems dramatised. Sometimes the situation which constitutes the problem seems to arise casually in the course of human affairs. In other cases there may be even within the story itself traces of contrivance and design to set up a pregnant situation; the problem then becomes, in the fullest sense, an experiment in morals.

I have elsewhere[1] discussed at length the play of *King Lear* as a problem drama: its plot may be thus stated. When Lear, at a check from Cordelia, suddenly overturns the carefully arranged division of the kingdom, we have imperious passion overthrowing conscience (represented in the interference of Kent), and setting up an unnatural distribution of power: power being taken from the good (Cordelia) and lodged in the hands of the bad (Goneril and Regan). The situation of unstable moral equilibrium thus set up makes the problem: for its solution we trace three interests side by side in the sequel of events. First, we have the nemesis

[1] In my *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist:* Chapter X.

upon the wrongdoer; a double nemesis, for Lear receives only ill from the daughters unjustly exalted, only good from the Cordelia he has injured. Again, in the sufferings of the innocent Cordelia and Kent we see a second consequence of Lear's wrong. For a third, we note, in the adulterous intrigues of Goneril and Regan, how power in the hands of the evil is used by them only to work out their own destruction. The problem as thus stated is duplicated in the underplot: in the family of Gloucester a father is misled into an unnatural distribution of power, power being wrongfully taken from the good (Edgar) and assigned to the bad (Edmund); there is the same triple series of consequences — the double nemesis on the wrongdoer, the sufferings of the innocent, the unrighteous exaltation used by Edmund for the intrigues in which he meets his doom. Again: the special interest of the Court Fool which is introduced into this play serves to emphasise a plot of this kind; it is just where Lear's sufferings at the hands of his daughters might divert our sympathies into a different channel that the Jester's part, with its strange compound of idle fooling with home thrusts of rebuke, comes to keep before us the idea that Lear is only meeting the solution of the problem his own rash act has set up. One more interest completes the plot of *Lear*. Though the underplot is a duplication of the main plot, yet there is a difference of spirit between the two. When Lear would sin, conscience strongly embodied in Kent starts up to hinder; in the case of Gloucester there is no such restraining power, but, on the contrary, the strong Edmund is a force tempting and leading his too credulous father on to his fatal error. Thus in the dim background of the story is suggested one of the fundamental problems of the moral world: how there are two types of sinners, those whose environment is a restraining force, like an embodied conscience, and those on the contrary, whose whole surroundings make one embodied temptation. The wider problem is only touched; something however of solution is hinted when we note how the tempter who misleads Gloucester is the offspring of illicit amour, so announced by Gloucester at the be-

ginning of the play in a tone of unrepenting levity:[1] the fruits of the former sins are seen to make the temptations of the future.

In this play the problem takes the form of disturbed equilibrium in the moral world working out to a position of rest. In *Measure for Measure* the movement is of a different character: the complexity of a situation may present itself to our minds as a problem, and the solution will display complexity gradually drawn into moral harmony. Much of our thinking on ethical subjects falls into the form of antitheses: not oppositions, as when good is set against evil, honesty against fraud; but relations of ideas which may be in opposition, but also may be in harmony. A twofold conception of this kind underlies the plot of *Measure for Measure*. One is the antithesis of purity and passion. For the other, the old antithesis of outer and inner life appears in the form of the law and the individual. These two antitheses underlie all parts of the plot, bringing its complexity up to the level of a moral problem; the climax reveals the diverse elements in complete reconciliation.

The life presented in *Measure for Measure* takes a threefold form as it is surveyed from the standpoint of purity. We have what may be called respectable life: the law of purity is here fully accepted; there is sin against purity in Angelo and Claudio, but their full acceptance of the law plunges them in bitter remorse. Between this and its opposite we find, represented in Lucio, that which is excellently described by the term ordinary conversation applies to it — loose life: respectability is claimed, yet there is tampering with vice, the spirit of raillery acting like Milton's conception of an easy bridge from earth to hell. And in the third place we have low life: not only is it vicious, but vice is an accepted institution.

At this point a question arises which is a disturbance to many readers: Why should low life of this type be allowed to appear on the stage at all? The iniquity of the brothel and the life of pros-

[1] I. i, from 9. For the whole chapter compare pages 353 and 354.

titution we are unwilling even to name in ordinary social intercourse, although all know of its existence. Yet in the poetry of Shakespeare we find such life presented; more than this, we seem often led into a sort of half sympathy, not indeed for the thing itself, but for some of those who are involved in its evil.

The question is part of a wider one; and the answer is the easier if we look at life from the standpoint of our second antithesis, that of the law and the individual. No moral system can be complete that does not make provision for what may be called Institutional Ethics: the complex ethical attitude that has to be maintained to the institution and to the individuals involved in it. War, considered in itself, must be classed as a moral wrong: founded on hate, its instruments bloodshed and violence, involving at times ruthlessness as a positive duty. Yet who will question that among warriors are sometimes to be found the highest types of moral greatness, while the work of war will often serve as a school of self-sacrifice and virtue? Poetry has always known how to consecrate the ideal of outlaw life by special types of it, although in itself this life is in antagonism to fundamental laws of property. Every reader of *Paradise Lost* feels in the course of the poem the attractiveness of Satan as a grand moral personality, although this Satan, by his position in the universe, is irreconcilably at war with supreme Good, and is seeking to seduce innocence into his own perversion. We have to separate, mentally, the institution and the individual; responsibility for the institution is one thing, responsibility of the individual is another. Whereso-ever the responsibility for a war rests, there is terrible guilt; but this does not suspend the moral law for the individuals plunged into war without fault on their part. In practical life it may be almost impossible to separate the two responsibilities. The judge may not say to the prisoner: The burglary of which you have been convicted deserves a ten years' sentence, but, in consideration of the magnificent stand you made against the police while your young comrade was escaping, I reduce your sentence by one half. The judge would be more likely to increase the sentence for an

additional offence against social order; yet the irresponsible bystander would nevertheless be touched by self-sacrificing comradeship, and all the more touched by the fact that it was exhibited in a burglar. Now, in all art we who see or read are in the position of spectators: we may give our full sympathy to the individual without any sense of responsibility for the institution. There is, of course, nothing in Shakespeare to make the vicious institution itself attractive. The Friar voices our loathing of it:

> The evil that thou causest to be done,
> That is thy means to live. Do thou but think
> What 'tis to cram a maw or clothe a back
> From such a filthy vice.[1]

The preacher's moralising on lust as the path to destruction does not come home so keenly as Pompey's humour when he finds himself in the common prison.

> I am as well acquainted here as I was in our house of profession: one would think it were Mistress Overdone's own house, for here be many of her old customers. . . . We have here young Dizy, and young Master Deep-Vow, and Master Copperspur, and Master Starve-lackey the rapier and dagger man, and young Drop-heir that killed lusty Pudding, and Master Forthlight the tilter, and brave Master Shooty the great traveller, and wild Half-can that stabbed Pots, and, I think, forty more; all great doers in our trade, and are now 'for the Lord's sake.'[2]

Meanwhile, even in this region of accepted vice, moral differences are yet to be discriminated, and our sympathy distinguishes between such as Overdone, who is vicious and nothing else, and Pompey, in whom, though he may be as guilty as his mistress, the salt of humour has kept the human nature from going entirely bad.

Not only the general field of life surveyed but also the individual personages rest for their dramatic interest on the same ideas.

[1] III. ii. 21. [2] IV. iii. 1.

The most important personages of the play group themselves naturally around the antithesis of purity and passion. Especially interesting is Angelo. The contrast between the Angelo of the opening scenes and Angelo fallen is not a contrast to be explained by hypocrisy. Angelo is sincere in his devotion to purity, and Isabella in time comes to see this.[1] But his devotion — though he is ignorant of the fact until he is tested — is not to a principle, but to a cause: Angelo is a partisan of purity. It has become a battle-cry between parties; Angelo has taken his side, and eagerly adopts all the livery of his party and enthusiasm of the fight, illustrating how zealously a man may strive on behalf of a principle which nevertheless has not entered deeply into his heart. The Duke's word, "Lord Angelo is precise," suggests the "precisian" or Puritan; we hear of "the outward-sainted deputy," of his "settled visage," his "dressings, characts, titles, forms;" the vicious in the story sneer at Angelo as if his blood were "very snow-broth," how "a sea-maid spawned him," or "he was begot between two stock-fishes;" he himself makes "levity" in Mariana his excuse for forsaking her.[2] Above all, under the full force of temptation he gives us a glimpse of self-revelation:

> Yea, my gravity,
> Wherein — let no man hear me — I take pride,
> Could I with boot change for an idle plume.[3]

At an opposite point from this Angelo we have Isabella, in whom purity is a passion. Not only is her brother's crime "the vice she most abhors and most desires should meet the blow of justice," but even legitimate passion she has renounced; she is entering upon a celibate life, and desiring a stricter restraint for the sisterhood.[4] Her innocence is of course spotless from first to last; but, instead of love harmonised with purity, we here have an overbalancing as between the two forms of good, and, passionate for

[1] V. i. 450.
[2] I. iii. 50; I. iv. 57; III. i. 89, 90; III. ii. 115; V. i. 56, 222.
[3] II. iv. 9.
[4] I. iv. 3; II. ii. 29.

purity, Isabella is cold to claims of love. Hence even Lucio appears at a moral advantage for a moment, when he presses upon Isabella the duty to her brother from which she shrinks:

> *Lucio.* Our doubts are traitors,
> And make us lose the good we oft might win
> By fearing to attempt.[1]

The crisis of the story distracts Isabella between claims of kinship and defence of outraged purity; we see the overbalanced nature in the cruel rage with which she turns upon her brother in his moment of weakness.[2] Even before this in soliloquy she has said—

> More than our brother is our chastity.[3]

No one will dare to contradict: but what do we think of the woman who can calmly formulate the principle?

Two more types complete this group. Mariana is all passion, but it is passion within the law of purity. If she seems to descend from the highest tone in consenting to the device by which the faithless Angelo is won, yet this measures the depth of the love which prompts the sacrifice. Mariana again is an illustration of the strange power of love to fasten upon the ideal, to love the man not for what he is but for what he is capable of becoming.[4] In Claudio and Juliet we have passion in conflict with the letter of the law. Their love is pure, their mutual fidelity inviolate; what they have sinned against is the conventional form of marriage which society throws as a hedge around the law of purity, and they have done this from motives of pecuniary interest.[5] Accordingly discovery not only brings them into danger, but also plunges them in remorse.

The administration of justice in this story gives us a small group of characters, distinguished by their relations to the antithesis of the law and the individual. The Provost is perfect in the balance of his allegiance to both. As a subordinate official, law is to him

[1] I. iv. 77. [2] III. i. 136. [3] II. iv. 185.
[4] Compare V. i. 430–46. [5] I. ii, from 149.

his oath of office, and under the strongest temptation he will not violate this;[1] within this one limit he is seen forever toiling to soften the rigour of justice for those with whom he has to do; the Duke recognises this.

> This is a gentle provost; seldom when
> The steeled gaoler is the friend of men.[2]

Elbow the constable belongs to the shallowest nature of which men can be made; he is fussily all for justice, as that whereby he gains self-importance.[3] The most interesting of the group is Escalus. The administration of justice is a perpetual conflict between law as an orderly science and the infinite variety of individual cases to which it has to be applied. The opening of the play presents Escalus as deeply versed in legal science.[4]

> *Duke.* The nature of our people,
> Our city's institutions, and the terms
> For common justice, you're as pregnant in
> As art and practice hath enriched any
> That we remember.

But what we see of this magistrate in the action of the play shows a bias towards individuality rather than law. He is not weak, and if necessary can be severe; but what he seems to love in each case is to study the human nature of the persons brought before him; he will pooh-pooh form and precedent if he can, with humour and rough leniency, find some practical course to fit the special case, and give everybody another chance.[5] We are familiar with the idea of lynch law: in Escalus we seem to have lynch mercy.

When we turn from interest of personality to interest of action the character of the play as a problem with its solution becomes much more clear. We find in *Measure for Measure* perhaps the purest example in poetry of a moral experiment. This is no case of a crisis arising of itself in the course of human events; the Duke, in his withdrawal from Vienna, is designedly contriving

[1] IV. ii. 194.
[2] IV. ii. 89.
[3] II. i, from 41; etc.
[4] I. i. 10.
[5] *E.g.* II. i.

special conditions in which he will be able to study the workings of human nature. But the scientific experimenter knows that nature is infinitely complex in its operations; he can determine for himself what forces he will set to work, but as to the mode in which they will manifest themselves he must be prepared for the unexpected; he must watch his experiment, use means to keep it within the channel he desires, and be prepared with resources to meet what may arise of the accidental. Hence the Duke does not really withdraw from his city, but hovers in disguise around the experiment he has set in motion; he secretly interferes from time to time, and at the proper moment reveals himself and terminates the situation. Both the complication and the resolution of the plot have their chief motive force in the Duke.

The design underlying the experiment of the plot rests upon the antithesis of the law and the individual; it is a double design, with an application alike to the dispensers of justice and to its victims. Imperfection in the administration of justice may arise from the shortcomings of those who administer it; moreover, so deeply does precedent enter into the idea of law, that the laxity of the past gives a tinge of injustice to later strictness. This is exactly what the Duke puts to his confidant.[1]

Duke. We have strict statutes and most biting laws,
The needful bits and curbs to headstrong weeds,
Which for this nineteen years we have let slip;
Even like an o'ergrown lion in a cave,
That goes not out to prey. Now, as fond fathers,
Having bound up the threatening twigs of birch,
Only to stick it in their children's sight
For terror, not to use, in time the rod
Becomes more mock'd than fear'd; so our decrees,
Dead to infliction, to themselves are dead;
And liberty plucks justice by the nose;
The baby beats the nurse, and quite athwart
Goes all decorum.

[1] I. iii.

Friar. It rested in your grace
To unloose this tied-up justice when you pleased:
And it in you more dreadful would have seem'd
Than in Lord Angelo.

Duke. I do fear, too dreadful:
Sith 'twas my fault to give the people scope,
'Twould be my tyranny to strike and gall them
For what I bid them do: for we bid this be done,
When evil deeds have their permissive pass,
And not the punishment.

Inspired by this perplexity the Duke has installed in his place the two magistrates Angelo and Escalus, representing the two horns of the dilemma: the workings of unpitying strictness and of considerate clemency are to be studied side by side. Angelo awakes "all the enrolled penalties which have like unscoured armour hung by the wall;" he will not have the law made a mere scarecrow.[1] Escalus, urging moderation, addresses himself directly to the personality of his colleague: might not even his strictness have yielded had he been subject to a sorer trial? Angelo answers:

'Tis one thing to be tempted, Escalus,
Another thing to fall. I not deny,
The jury, passing on the prisoner's life,
May in the sworn twelve have a thief or two
Guiltier than him they try. What's open made to justice,
That justice seizes: what know the laws
That thieves do pass on thieves? [2]

Thus the characters of the men chosen by the Duke are just fitted for bringing out one element in the experiment — the relationship between law and the personality of those who administer justice. But the personalities of those on whom justice is to be exercised, not less than the characters of the judges, may raise the conflict of law and individuality. Here again may be seen opposite bias in the colleagues on the bench. When appeal of this kind is made to Angelo, he answers:

[1] I. ii. 170; II. i. 1. [2] II. i. 17.

Condemn the fault, and not the actor of it?
Why, every fault's condemn'd ere it be done:
Mine were the very cipher of a function,
To fine the faults whose fine stands in record,
And let go by the actor.

Escalus has no authority to interfere; but he feels bitterly the unequal pressure of justice on different individuals.

Some rise by sin, and some by virtue fall:
Some run through brakes of vice, and answer none;
And some condemned for a fault alone.[1]

In its general scope then the experiment of the Duke is clear and simple: strictness of justice and lenity are to be set separately to work. But neither the Duke nor any one else could foresee the exact issues that would arise as particular cases set these forces in operation. Scarcely has Vienna been left to its new deputies when the crime of Claudio — one who has grossly violated the outward form of law while he is true to its spirit — brings into full play the opposing principles: Escalus emphasises the extenuating circumstances, Angelo looks only at the offence. But this Claudio has a sister Isabella who pleads with Angelo for her brother: at once new moral issues appear of the deepest interest. The first affects the character of Angelo. To a certain extent the Duke had foreseen this.

Angelo,
There is a kind of character in thy life,
That to th' observer doth thy history
Fully unfold.[2]

The expression "a kind of character" seems to veil a slight doubt in the ruler's mind as to what the outer stamp upon the life of Angelo might reveal to the assayer; it is part of his experiment that the possession of power should force the character of seeming precision to reveal its true nature. But no one could have guessed

[1] II. ii. 37; II. i. 38. [2] I. i. 27.

in what form the assaying would come: that Angelo should be confronted by a purity as zealous as his own, yet wholly different in kind; to use Angelo's own word, that "gravity" should be tempted by "gravity."

> What's this, what's this? is it her fault or mine?
> The tempter or the tempted, who sins most?
> Ha!
> Not she; nor doth she tempt: but it is I
> That, lying by the violet in the sun,
> Do as the carrion does, not as the flower,
> Corrupt with virtuous season. Can it be
> That modesty may more betray our sense
> Than woman's lightness? Having waste ground enough,
> Shall we desire to raze the sanctuary
> And pitch our evils there? . . . What is't I dream on?
> O cunning enemy, that, to catch a saint,
> With saints dost bait thy hook! Most dangerous
> Is that temptation that doth goad us on
> To sin in loving virtue! [1]

As Isabella slowly warms to her work of interceding for Claudio her womanly intuition penetrates the mystery of Angelo's nature; with the insight of ideal purity, she distinguishes between internal and external purity, she catches Angelo's zeal for the cause, his ambition to be its foremost champion.

> So you must be the first that gives this sentence,
> And he that suffers. O, it is excellent
> To have a giant's strength; but it is tyrannous
> To use it like a giant.[2]

By the mere contact then of Angelo with Isabella a double effect has been produced: Angelo has been suddenly revealed to himself, and is being gradually revealed to Isabella. And with all this is conjoined another moral issue of high interest: Isabella's own personality has been drawn into the area of experiment, and there is distraction in her soul between passionate purity and brotherly love.

[1] II. ii. 162. [2] II. ii. 106, and whole scene.

How then at this point does the plot of the play stand, considered as an experiment in the field of morals? One side of the design has been fully revealed in the light of events — the relation between justice and the character of the judge; and the conclusion of the third act can moralise in the style of an epilogue:

> He who the sword of heaven will bear
> Should be as holy as severe.[1]

But this stage of the experiment has been attained only at the cost of a great moral conflict: Angelo is at deadly feud with Angelo, Isabella the nun knows not how to be true to Isabella the sister of a brother Claudio; Claudio himself is confronted with the fullest vengeance of a law which, of all such offenders, Claudio has least offended.

Here then a fresh stage in the plot unfolds itself: the experimenter must come to the aid of his own experiment, and complication passes into resolution. The soliloquy just quoted proceeds:

> Craft against vice I must apply.

The expression may be somewhat startling, for fiction has accustomed us to associate intrigue with purposes of evil; but there is no reason why secret agency and finesse of contrivance may not be employed in the service of good. The craft of the Duke is of the craftiest: upon a grave moral crisis and impending sin of Angelo is brought to bear a former moral error of the same man, and so used that the one is averted and the other repaired.

> *Duke.* Have you not heard speak of Mariana, the sister of Frederick the great soldier who miscarried at sea?
>
> *Isab.* I have heard of the lady, and good words went with her name.
>
> *Duke.* She should this Angelo have married; was affianced to her by oath, and the nuptial appointed: between which time of the contract and limit of the solemnity, her brother Freder-

[1] III. ii. 275.

ick was wrecked at sea, having in that perished vessel the dowry of his sister. But mark how heavily this befell to the poor gentlewoman: there she lost a noble and renowned brother, in his love toward her ever most kind and natural; with him the portion and sinew of her fortune, her marriage-dowry; with both, her combinate husband, this well-seeming Angelo.

Isab. Can this be so? did Angelo so leave her?

Duke. Left her in tears, and dried not one of them with his comfort; swallowed his vows whole, pretending in her discoveries of dishonour: in few, bestowed her on her own lamentation, which she yet wears for his sake; and he, a marble to her tears, is washed with them, but relents not.[1]

By the substitution of Mariana for Isabella, a crime committed in intention by Angelo is made to redress his former injury; a supposed sin of Isabella saves her tempter from actual guilt; and further, the fancied sin is the price of salvation for Claudio.

But the unforeseen plays a part in all experiment. It comes as a surprise, and yet is perfectly true to nature, that Angelo, in moral revulsion and spiritual turmoil at his self-surrender to sin, should plunge from one crime to another, from fear of consequences basely withholding the price of his victim's ruin, and secretly hastening the execution of her brother.[2] The Duke must find some expedient to meet this: he intrigues to substitute a hardened criminal, long designated for well deserved execution, instead of the Claudio whom over-rigorous justice was demanding. But an obstacle arises:[3] at the last moment this Barnardine is found to be in a reprobate frame of mind, utterly unmeet for death. The whole experiment is threatened, when suddenly accident — that plays so large a part in the providence of Shakespeare — intervenes to save.

Provost. Here in the prison, father,
There died this morning of a cruel fever
One Ragozine, a most notorious pirate,

[1] III. i, from 216. [2] IV. ii, from 118. [3] IV. iii, from 70.

A man of Claudio's years; his beard and head
Just of his colour. What if we do omit
This reprobate till he were well inclined;
And satisfy the deputy with the visage
Of Ragozine, more like to Claudio?

Duke. O, 'tis an accident that heaven provides!

With this final touch craft has done its full work against vice: in all but the outward show of things, reserved for the final scene, the main resolution of the plot is complete.

Meanwhile, in the person of Escalus, the other side of justice is allowed its scope, that relaxes law in order to study the individual, and find a treatment fitted to each single case; the paternal justice, that hopes against hope for the reformation of the sinner. Escalus on the bench has evidently a keen enjoyment in studying the human nature in front of him; he can bandy wit with low life, and meet it on its own ground.[1] The fussy constable he soothes, and gently leads up to the idea that society has been doing him an injustice in burdening him so long with office. For the prisoners the lenient justice of Escalus takes two forms. The first is, in spite of plain guilt, to give one more opportunity of amendment; but this proves vain for such ingrained evil as that of Overdone and Pompey.

Pompey. Whip me? No, no; let carman whip his jade:
The valiant heart's not whipt out of his trade.

Where this kind of leniency has failed, there is yet possible mercy in another form — discrimination of character. The woman, in whom there is nothing for amendment to lay hold of, is left to her fate.[2] But Pompey, whose irrepressible humour reveals some depth of soil in his original nature, has a sphere for himself even in prison life. He even comes to be promoted — promoted to the office of under-hangman: the common executioner however fears that one of Pompey's former mode of life "will discredit our mystery."[3]

[1] II. i. [2] III. ii. 201. [3] III. ii; IV. ii.

The type of character represented in Lucio has also had its part in the action. We do not build a gallows for a butterfly; it satisfies the fitness of things when loose humour is encountered by irony of situation: here is a jocose problem and solution.[1] Lucio, who is hail-fellow with all men, turns his light wit upon the strange Friar; the raillery that spares no subject, and insists upon bringing everything down to its own level, plays upon the character of the absent Duke — how "the Duke had crotchets in him," how he would have had good reason for dealing differently with sins like Claudio's.

> *Duke.* Sir, the Duke is marvellous little beholding to your reports; but the best is, he lives not in them.
>
> *Lucio.* Friar, thou knowest not the Duke so well as I do: he's a better woodman than thou takest him for.
>
> *Duke.* Well, you'll answer this one day. Fare ye well.
>
> *Lucio.* Nay, tarry; I'll go along with thee; I can tell thee pretty tales of the Duke.
>
> *Duke.* You have told me too many of him already, sir, if they be true; if not true, none were enough.
>
> *Lucio.* I was once before him —

Lucio proceeds with confidential gaiety to blab his own misdeeds, and hands justice a rod with which to scourge him. He enters boisterously into the excitement of the final scene, enjoying his own audacity as he puts on to the Friar his own slanders of the Duke. Then, when all seems to go against this mysterious stranger, Lucio is the first to lay violent hands upon him and pull off his hood: levity itself gives the last touch that brings the shock of dénouement to the plot.

> Thou art the first knave that e'er madest a Duke.

Thus the complication of this exquisite plot has reached its adequate resolution; the moral problem has been fully solved, and the reconciling force emerges as Mercy in its many-sidedness.

[1] IV. iii, from 154; V. i.

Angelo, in his zealous service for the cause of purity, has encountered a shock, revealing to him that he is not pure; giving his sensual race the rein, he has plunged from sin to sin. All the while, unknown to him, his slighted love has been an embodiment of mercy, by dark means restoring him to himself, still innocent as regards actions, and for guilty intentions giving the hope that best men may be moulded out of faults. Isabella, cold to love in her passion for purity, has nevertheless been led to become an angel of mercy for her unhappy brother, while for herself she has, without seeking, found in the Duke a power that will make purity and passion one. Claudio and Juliet by their sufferings have made atonement to the letter of the law which they have violated, while they were true to its spirit, and so have their part in the harmony of mercy. We seem to see a reconciling force beneath the course of events as we behold levity encountered by irony; or again, as characters that have sunk to the depths find in the lowest depth some recognition of what is yet good in them. Surveying from all its sides this drama of Justice we catch a majestic presentation of Mercy, not as diluted and weakened Justice, but as something transcending Justice, holding allegiance equally to the law and the individual, giving scope for the warmth of passion while it does reverence to the light of purity. What Shakespeare dramatises in the concrete, Spenser had already celebrated in ideal form.

> For if that virtue be of so great might,
> Which from just verdict will for nothing start,
> But, to preserve inviolated right,
> Oft spills the principal to save the part:
> So much more, then, is [Mercy] of power and art
> Which seeks to save the subject of her skill,
> Yet never doth from doom of right depart;
> As it is greater praise to save than spill,
> And better to reform than to cut off the ill.[1]

[1] *Faerie Queene*, V. x. 2.

VIII

COMEDY AS LIFE IN EQUILIBRIUM

The two plays treated in the preceding chapter have illustrated two out of the three classes into which the Shakespearean Drama is ordinarily divided — tragedy and comedy. It is natural, in an attempt to survey Shakespeare's world in its moral complexity, to ask, What is tragedy? and what is comedy? Possibly, indeed, this inquiry might legitimately be evaded. It is not certain that the descriptive title under which a literary work is announced is a part of the literary work itself. Obviously, as the words 'tragic,' 'comic' are used in ordinary conversation, it is difficult to apply them to Shakespeare; what can be less comic than the scene between Isabella and her brother in prison? and what can be more comic than the Fool in *Lear?* Moreover, a possible explanation for the misapplication of the terms is ready to hand. Shakespeare produced his plays in an age which strove to adapt all literature to the forms of the literature of Greece. Now in Greek drama the distinction of tragedy and comedy was absolute; the two were never combined in the same representation, and the criticism of the age understood the difference between tragedy and comedy to be just that between the words 'serious' and 'laughable.'[1] It would be entirely in keeping with the general tendencies of Elizabethan literature that two terms of ancient drama should be applied in a modern literature where they might really have no place. Accordingly, I have elsewhere[2] advocated the use of different terms to express the divisions of the Shake-

[1] *Spoudaios* and *geloios*.

[2] In my *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist*, page 372.

spearean drama. But, whether the terms be appropriate or not, the classification they attempt to convey is a real one: to examine the principle underlying the classification is the object of this and the following chapter.

The examination here attempted must be distinguished from another treatment of the subject often followed, by which conceptions of tragedy and comedy are formed from first principles and the nature of things, and then particular plays are tried by this conception as to the degree to which they satisfy it. All such judicial criticism is outside the scope of the present work: we are to form our conceptions of Shakespearean tragedy and comedy only from the nature and contents of plays so designated. But in carrying this principle into operation one consideration should be borne in mind. Every species of literature is the heir of the whole literary past: whatever has constituted an element of dramatic poetry before Shakespeare may possibly reappear in the Shakespearean Drama, in subordination to or as a part of that which gives the new species of drama its distinctiveness. A rapid review then of certain earlier forms of drama and kindred literature will make a favourable position from which to undertake our specific inquiry what in Shakespeare is tragedy, and what is comedy. It will be convenient to begin with the subject of comedy, reserving tragedy for the next chapter.

The literary evolution of which Shakespeare is a part takes its origin, not from early English literature, but from the literature of Greece. In primitive Greek life, at a time when all kinds of social activity found literary expression in some form of ballad dance, the 'comus' was the ballad dance of the revel.[1] The same persons, it might be, who at one part of the day had in the stately and restrained dance of the 'chorus' breathed their adoration to the gods, would at another part of the day throw off restraint,

[1] The origin of comedy in the comus, and its early stages of development, are treated at length in my *Ancient Classical Drama*, Chapter VII, and subsequent chapters.

and, wildly dancing hand in hand through a whole country side, abandon themselves to rhythmic mirth and every kind of boisterous jollity. All that the comus uttered was 'comedy': thus in its ultimate origin the whole spirit of comedy was comprehended in fun and self-abandonment. Soon, as we know, a modification took place; the custom arose of halting the comus dance at cross roads, while the revellers exchanged bouts of chaff and popular badinage with one another and with passers-by; here we get, not fun only, but fun directed against an object, or satire. Yet another modification was caused by the peculiar social conditions of ancient Greece. It was a country made up of sharply contrasting states, aristocratic and democratic. Where democratic institutions prevailed the license of the comus would know no limits, and might touch everybody and everything in public or private life. Where, on the other hand, aristocracy was supreme, it is easy to understand how popular satire would be restrained from attacking individuals or political questions; the energies of the comus would be concentrated upon satirising human nature in general, or particular classes of society. Accordingly, as a matter of historic fact, the aristocratic states of Greece and its colonies early brought into prominence a form of comedy depending mainly upon social satire, the ridiculing of the quack, or the market thief, or whatever type of early society was obnoxious to popular feeling: in literary technicalities this is 'caricature.' Thus within the limits of primitive literature the spirit of comedy already appears to be complex, comprehending the three elements of fun, satire, and caricature.

The evolution of comedy next brings us to a distinct literary revolution, which gave the world Old Attic Comedy and Aristophanes. This revolution consisted, essentially, in the fact that comedy came to imitate the structure of tragedy. While the former was a rude popular sport, tragedy in Greece — an interweaving of dramatic scenes on the stage with elaborate choral odes in the orchestra — had become a solemn religious ceremonial, celebrated with great magnificence at the public expense.

The mode by which a tragic representation was secured was expressed by the technical phrase that the poet "received a chorus" from the magistrate; it was understood that, with the chorus, all the expenses of training and mounting were provided for him. Now, a phrase of Aristotle in his historic sketch informs us that "it was late before comedy received a chorus." The history underlying that simple statement seems to have been this. The comic poets would naturally desire to share the privileges of their brethren of tragedy; if they had applied — as, logically, they ought to have done — for a comus, the magistrate would meet them with the answer that there was no precedent for equipping a comus at the public expense; they therefore put a bold face on the matter and requested a chorus, and at length from some friendly magistrate obtained it. Once a comic poet had obtained his chorus he would have the full privileges of public representation; only of course he must use the chorus, and so cast his comedy in the structural form of dramatic scenes separated by choral odes. It is true that the chorus — most stately of all ballad dances — was entirely incongruous with comedy. But incongruity is itself a comic effect: in this idea we get the distinctive spirit of the Old Attic Comedy. It is still, what earlier comedy has been, wild fun, satire, caricature; but in structure it must alternate and combine choral songs with actor's dialogue; above all, the presence of the chorus favours the sudden change from comic to serious, from popular fun to elevated poetry. The *Clouds* of Aristophanes burlesques the new education by farcical scenes representing a rough lout, and his son an effeminate fop, trying to learn the new methods of Socrates; as part of the burlesque Socrates is made out an atheist, worshipping no gods except the virgin Clouds. This gives opportunity for a chorus of Clouds, moving about the orchestra with delicate dance motions; they take a small share in the general burlesque, but can also give opportunity for the highest lyrical poetry, embodying exquisite conceptions of cloud life: how —

> Lightly they rest on the time-honoured crest of Olympus, environed in snow,
> Or tread the soft dance mid the stately expanse of old Ocean, the nymphs to beguile,
> Or stoop to enfold in their pitchers of gold the mystical waves of the Nile;
> Or around the white foam of Maeotis they roam, or Mimas all wintry and bare.

A revolution in art has thus introduced a new element into literature; the conception of comedy has enlarged to take in the serious. The mixture of tones — sharp contrasts of comic and serious, rudeness and poetic elevation — has obtained an established place in dramatic literature.

A great mass of Greek literature, representing many stages in dramatic evolution, has been entirely lost; when comedy is next seen it is in the hands of the Romans. As we might expect, this Roman comedy exhibits a great change from the old Attic type. We are not concerned here with structural change, such as the loss of the chorus, which has left in its place some metrical flexibility and a tendency towards moralising. But in its general spirit Roman comedy, without losing the old, has admitted a new element; it is dominated by what is among the most permanent of all literary interests — the interest of story. The term 'story' may cover any narrative of events; but story *par excellence* is seen where the succession of incidents moves in the form of complication and resolution. These terms seem to explain themselves. To take illustration from story in its simplest form. An anecdote tells of a disappointed lover wishing to commit suicide, only he is deterred by fear — not fear of dying, but of failing to die. At last, grown more desperate, he provides himself with a pistol, a rope, a phial of poison, and a box of matches, and he climbs to a precipice overhanging the sea. He fastens the rope to a projecting tree and puts the loop round his neck; then he loads the pistol, swallows the poison, strikes the matches and puts them in his bosom, jumps off the precipice, and fires at his fore-

head as he jumps. We have complication enough of suicide when a man is being at once hanged, poisoned, shot, and burned, to say nothing of a death by drowning suggested from below. Resolution of this complication is found in the simple circumstance that the aim of the pistol was bad, that the ball severed the rope and the man fell into the sea, which put out the fire, while the tossing on the waves before he could get to shore made the unhappy man vomit the poison, so that he found himself alive after all. This device of leading events into a complication only that the complication may be resolved makes one of the most prominent forms of story interest for all literature. In Roman comedy it is the pure interest of story, simple or complicated, which is supreme. The older elements of comedy are not lost: there is the mixture of burlesque scenes with serious moralising; there is plenty of satire and broad fun; and caricature is seen enlarged by three specially Roman types, of the parasite (or diner-out), the saucy slave joking old jokes like a modern clown, and the sharper. But these interests belong to details, or tend to make a separate underplot; the main plot rests, not upon the fun or extravagance of the matter, but upon the interest of the story itself with its complication and resolution. The *Captives* of Plautus presents a father using his wealth to purchase prisoners of war, in order that he may have wherewith to make exchange for his own son, who has recently been taken prisoner by the enemy. Among his purchases is a certain master with his slave; in reality the slave is another son of the same father stolen away in childhood: already we have the complication of a father unconsciously holding his own son as a slave. The complication increases as the captive master and slave arrange secretly to exchange positions, so that the slave (supposed to be the master) may be retained, while the real master (supposed to be the slave) is sent away into the enemy's country to arrange for ransom. In time the father discovers the fraud that has been put upon him, and in anger dooms the remaining captive (his own son in fact) to the hard labour of the quarries. The resolution comes with the return of the other son,

duly ransomed, and at the same time the arrival of the runaway slave who had years ago stolen the child: through the latter the identity of this stolen child with the captive doomed to the quarries is made known, and all ends happily. The working out of this complication and resolution is the main business of the play; but through its scenes there flits a parasite of the usual type, with monstrous caricature of eating powers and social servility; he is given a slight connection with the main business in being the first to announce the return of the son from captivity, for which he claims free quarters in the household for life. A main plot with interest of story, and an underplot of caricature, make this a typical Roman comedy.

The comedy then of ancient literature embraced all these interests of fun, satire, caricature, the intermingling of serious with gay matter, and, to crown all, the supreme interest of story with its complication and resolution. One remark must be added. Partly through connection of primitive drama with religious ritual, and partly through mechanical difficulties of early stage representation, the ancient drama was limited to a single scene. Lacking the device of scene-changing, ancient comedy was prevented from presenting the whole course of a story; it could put on the stage only the end or the crisis of the story, leaving other parts of it to be inferred or suggested indirectly. In technical phrase, the whole of ancient comedy was comedy of situation: its movement was an opening situation of complication developed to a resolution. And this kind of movement has come to be called 'classical,' to distinguish it from movement of an opposite type, such as we find in Shakespeare and romantic drama.

Between the close of the ancient drama and the Elizabethan age there intervenes a vast gulf of time: the Roman empire, with its Greek-Roman literature, is slowly passing into the civilisation of modern Europe, but passing through 'dark ages,' in which literature and art and the higher culture seem in danger of being lost in a social chaos, while the one civilisation which has fallen into decay is grappling with the other civilisation not yet emerged

from barbarism. Among other changes of this period drama ceases to be a vital form of literature; the stage gives place to the minstrel as the purveyor of popular amusement, and instead of acted story we get story narrated. At the same time story becomes, more than at any other time, the dominant interest in literature. The minstrels were a wandering class, passing from place to place and from people to people, and drawing the mythological stores of all nations into a common stock; the dark ages became a vast gathering ground for stories of all kinds — stories long and short, epic and anecdote, serious tales and funny, narratives sacred and profane. From the fact that such stories passed from spoken into written literature at a time when the Romance languages were in process of formation, the term 'romance' has come to describe the mediæval accumulation of story lore.

In several points the phenomena of this romance are important for their bearing on the literature of the future. To this period we are indebted for the immense accentuation of story among the leading interests of literature — the interest of story for story's sake, apart from the mode in which it is presented. Again, romance gives us, not merely multiplication, but also aggregation of stories: literary interest is felt in interweaving many different tales into a system. Sometimes a common moral purpose, as in the *Gesta Romanorum* or Gower's *Lover's Confession*, will be made an excuse for a collection of stories. Or, one introductory tale will ingeniously be treated as a thread on which to string any number of other tales: the *Arabian Nights* and *Canterbury Tales* are familiar examples. But the most important influence of romance in the evolution of literature was the fact that it set free story from the limitations imposed upon it by the ancient stage; instead of being cramped into the one form of a complicated situation resolving, the stories of romance were free to follow natural movement, and exhibit the whole course of events from beginning to end.

Yet another of the phenomena of romance is to be noted, which has a more immediate bearing upon the subject of the present

chapter. 'Tragedy' and 'comedy' passed into romance as terms for narrated stories, and gradually a considerable amount of change came over the relative signification of the two words. Originally, in Greek drama, tragedy and comedy were distinct things, the one serious, the other amusing. Later, even within the limits of classical drama, we have seen how comedy enlarged its meaning and allowed the serious to mingle with the ludicrous. When all limitation due to connection with particular festivals was removed, the stories of romance would be still freer to follow human life in the mixture of tones, light and dark drawn closer together in tragedies and comedies alike. But a more specific change came about, that was destined to influence greatly the drama of the future. Fashion is a potent factor in art; in the latter part of the romance period a certain type of story came into fashion, and more and more maintained its hold on the popular mind. It found expression in collection after collection of story lore, perhaps the most characteristic of which belongs to a later period — the *Mirror for Magistrates*. Under this name appeared, one after another, encyclopædias of stories, all cast in one mould; the word 'magistrate' was applied to one who had held any exalted station, and the interest of the story lay in his fall from this exaltation. Greatness fallen had become the most popular theme of story in a story age. Gradually the word 'tragedy,' though no doubt it could still be used of any serious story, came more and more in the popular mind to suggest this overpowering interest of an exaltation and a fall. And, as tragedy was becoming specialised in its significance, in the same proportion the correlative word 'comedy' was enlarging to take in any story that was not, in the newer sense, a tragedy. This accounts for the curious circumstance that the most profoundly serious story ever composed, a story leading us through hell, purgatory, and paradise, could be entitled by Dante 'The Divine Comedy': to mediæval ears this need suggest no more than 'The Divine Story.'

Shakespeare belongs to the Romantic Drama; that is to say, to the amalgamation of drama and romance. The Renaissance

terminated the dark ages by bringing fully to light the literature of ancient Greece and Rome. The masterpieces of this literature were spread over western Europe, and inspired new literary creation. The magnificent dramas of antiquity became models for Elizabethan playwrights: "Seneca could not be too heavy for them, nor Plautus too light." But the matter which they undertook to dramatise was taken from the story books of romance, including the chronicle histories which were treated as romances: here is found the other constituent element of Elizabethan drama. The influence of romance, with its long hold on the popular mind, was not less powerful than the inspiration upon the dramatists of the classical models; in a Shakespearean play it is clear that the purpose to lead up to dramatic situations and effects is not more prominent than the purpose to do justice to the story for its own sake. When romantic dramas are compared with the classical dramas of antiquity, it is easy to see how the powerful influence of romance has been able to sweep away all the limitations of the old dramatic form; how there is no longer any obstacle to the free intermingling of serious and light tones; how stage representation has had to adapt itself to romantic interest, and, by free multiplication of scenes, with intervals between the scenes, make provision for presenting the whole course of a story from beginning to end.

We are now in a position to take up the main question of this chapter: What is the Shakespearean conception of comedy? We may expect to find that it will comprehend all that has been an element of comedy in the past; further, that its distinctiveness will rest upon the union of drama with romance. The conception may be formulated under two heads, which can be treated separately. For the first, we may say that *Comedy in Shakespeare is story raised to its highest power.*

Even in Roman Comedy the interest of story was supreme; the romance of the dark ages not only emphasised this interest, but also widened the meaning of the word 'comedy' until it became

almost equivalent to 'story.' In Shakespeare story is raised to the highest power as the harmony of many stories. Plot in romantic drama differs from classical plot as harmony in music differs from unison; it is a federation of several stories, any one of which would have made a whole plot for an ancient dramatist. *The Merchant of Venice* furnishes a simple illustration. Here we have two main stories, taken from distinct books of romance well known at the time. One is the story of the cruel Jew: how a Christian merchant came to enter into a bond with a Jewish creditor the terms of which involved a pound of the debtor's flesh; how the bond came to be forfeited; how at the last moment it was pointed out that no provision had been made for the shedding of blood, and on this pretext the bond was upset. The other is the story of the caskets: that a father bequeathed his daughter's hand and fortune to the suitor who should make the right choice between three caskets; that many failed, but the real lover chose the right casket and won the maiden. The two stories are interwoven by Shakespeare in this manner: he makes the desire to assist Bassanio, the lover in the caskets story, the motive of Antonio, the merchant of the other story, in his entering into the strange bond; while Portia, the maiden of the caskets, is the disguised judge who upsets the bond and saves the merchant; two stories could not be more neatly interwoven than when the hero of the one is the complicating force of the other, and the heroine of the one the resolving force of the other. But the plot of *The Merchant of Venice* includes more stories than these. There is the story of the betrothal ring: how a betrothed maiden happens, when in disguise, to meet her lover, and entices from him his betrothal ring; returning to him in her proper guise she teases him for a while, and then the mystery is explained. The interweaving of this third story with the other two is on this wise: Portia's appearance as a judge in the Venetian court, however grand a thing in itself, gives a touch of the masculine at the moment to her character; between this and the end of the play is inserted this girlish frolic of the ring mystery, and the heroine's

character is felt to be exquisitely balanced before the curtain falls. Again, place is found in the plot for a fourth story. The story of the Jew involves an interval of three months between the signing of the bond and its falling due; instead of *supposing* an interval between the acts, Shakespeare introduces a new interest — the elopement of Jessica the Jew's daughter with the Christian Lorenzo, and thus fills the gap of three months with a succession of busy scenes, converting a weakness into a strength. These four distinct stories move side by side through the scenes of the play, supporting one another by a sort of dramatic counterpoint, like the four parts of a musical harmony. In reality, the plot of *The Merchant of Venice* is even more complex than this, and two out of the four stories are duplicated: not only Portia, but also her maid Nerissa has an adventure with a betrothal ring; just as the Jew's daughter is wedded to a Christian husband, so his roguish servant Launcelot is transferred to Christian service.[1]

A Shakespearean comedy then is a harmony of many stories. But, while the term may mean a simple sequence of events, we have seen that story *par excellence* is found where the movement leads us through a complication of affairs to a resolution. Hence it is natural to find that a large proportion of the stories in Shakespeare's plots are complicated and resolved. Such complication and resolution may take a great variety of different forms. Sometimes we have 'error' — that is, mistaken identity — and the recognition that ends it: Plautus had made a plot out of the confusion between two twin brothers, the *Comedy of Errors* duplicates the entanglement by giving the twin brothers slaves who are twins. Sometimes we have folly and its exposure: Parolles moves through the scenes of *All's Well That End's Well* posing as a hero and man of military erudition, until a conspiracy betrays him in his real character as a coward and a fool. Or the complication may consist in peril and the resolution in release: Ægeon in the *Comedy of Errors* stands in danger of his life up to the point

[1] Compare the scheme of the plot in the Appendix, below, page 347.

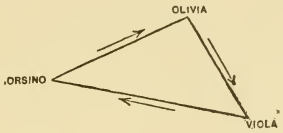
where accident brings salvation as he is on his way to the block. Play after play will give examples of the complication of intrigue, to which the resolution may come either in the form of success or confusion. We have seen in *Winter's Tale* and *Cymbeline* how a plot may be founded on moral fall and restoration; in *Measure for Measure* on a moral problem and its solution. Complication and resolution is an abstract idea, which may manifest itself in any number of different concrete forms.

The intensification of story interest in Shakespearean comedy goes further still. Not only do we find individual stories that enter into a plot complicated and resolved: we further find clash and disentanglement between these complicated and resolved stories; more even than this, analysis can sometimes trace how there is clash and disentanglement between these clashes of stories. This can be made clear only by a somewhat detailed analysis of particular plays.

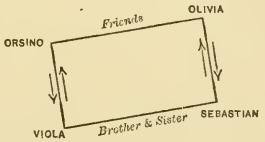
The main plot of *Twelfth Night*[1] is a complex story of love: that particular type of love which in Elizabethan drama is called fancy, where some waywardness or whim, or perhaps accident, has had much to do with determining choice. Three personages appear: Orsino the duke, Olivia the heiress, and Viola, the shipwrecked girl who for safety takes the disguise of a page. Each of the three is the centre of a love story; in each case the love is complicated by rejection, yet attains a happy conclusion. Any one of these three loves could be separated from the rest of the play, and narrated as a complete story in itself. In the actual plot however the three love stories are made to clash together into a common entanglement, owing to the mistaken identity of the girl taken for a page. Viola has no sooner entered as a page into the service of the Duke than she secretly falls in love with her master; the Duke has long been in love with the heiress Olivia, who will have nothing to do with him, but mopes in solitude; when the Duke sends his pretty page with messages of love to his mistress,

[1] Compare the scheme of the plot in the Appendix, below, page 340.

this is not more cruel to the disguised Viola than fatal to Olivia, who at once falls hopelessly in love with the messenger page. Three separate loves have clashed into a triangular duel of disap-



pointed fancy: Orsino in love with Olivia, Olivia in love with Viola, Viola in love with Duke Orsino. The disentanglement comes when a twin brother of Viola, Sebastian, appears on the scene: Olivia unconsciously transfers her fancy to this Sebastian, and is married before she discovers her mistake; Orsino, having lost Olivia, is free to receive the love of Viola when she appears as



a girl; and Viola's secret love can be confessed when her brother's arrival leads her to drop her disguise. The triangular duel has resolved into a parallelogram of the forces of love and kinship: two happy couples, a pair of friends who could not be lovers, a brother and a sister. The main plot then of this play has appeared as a clash, due to mistakes of identity, with subsequent disentanglement, between three love stories, each of which, looked at in itself, is complicated and resolved.

The underplot of the play is totally different in matter, but identical in form. Instead of a triangular duel in love we have a triplet of follies. Somewhat after the fashion of the moral scale of wrongs already noted in *Cymbeline*,[1] we have in this play a grad-

[1] Above, page 77.

uation of the folly — three types that make a descending scale as viewed from the standpoint of the natural. Sir Toby Belch (with whom may be classed Maria) exhibits the natural fooling which seems no more than a vent for health and high spirit. Sir Andrew Aguecheek joins in the folly: but in this case we have, not a genuine article, but a wretched imitation. When Sir Toby will follow the mischievous Maria "to the gates of Tartar," Sir Andrew puts in his "I'll make one too:" the single phrase sums up all there is in this imitative folly, struggling, without any sense of the ludicrous, to copy the outside ways of funny people, and laboriously learn to be gay. At a still further remove from what is natural we may place Malvolio's artificial antagonism to frivolity; — artificial, for care is taken to show that Malvolio is no genuine precisian.

> The devil a puritan that he is, or anything constantly, but a time-pleaser; an affectioned ass, that cons state without book and utters it by great swarths: the best persuaded of himself, so crammed, as he thinks, with excellencies, that it is his grounds of faith that all that look on him love him.[1]

Each of these three types makes a separate story of folly and its exposure. Sir Toby, by sheer force of boisterous jollity, dominates the scenes until his practical joking is tried on a stouter man than himself; the imitator Aguecheek as usual is with him, and both encounter the same shock.

> *Olivia.* What's the matter?
>
> *Sir And.* He has broke my head across and has given Sir Toby a bloody coxcomb too: for the love of God, your help! I had rather than forty pound I were at home.[2]

For Sir Toby and his natural folly exposure ends in nothing worse of penance than marriage with the maid Maria; the paltry imitator has the ignoble end of being cast off even by his model, who calls him an ass-head and a coxcomb and a gull. For the folly of Malvolio, that runs so counter to ordinary human nature,

[1] *Twelfth Night*: II. iii. 159. [2] V. i. 178.

a far worse fate is reserved: his self-importance is played upon by a deep conspiracy, and he is led to come, cross-gartered and in yellow stockings, into his mistress's presence and smile his ungainly courtship, until he has to be put in restraint, while his indignant protests are read ingeniously as symptoms of madness. But these three stories of folly are not separate in the plot of the play: two of them are seen to clash with the third, as Toby, Maria and Aguecheek devise the conspiracy against Malvolio, the more natural of the follies uniting against that which is wholly unnatural:[1] this clash of stories finds its disentanglement only in the mutual explanations which conclude the drama. The underplot, like the main plot, is seen to exhibit a clash and disentanglement between three stories, each of which is itself complicated and resolved.

Already in this play we have two distinct systems of stories, a main plot and an underplot, and each in itself is a clash between three complicated stories. The entanglement increases as the two systems are brought into conflict, the underplot clashing with the main plot. Sir Toby is forever drawing out the unconscious absurdity of Aguecheek, having as his hold upon him Aguecheek's absurd pretensions to the hand of Olivia. At one point Sir Toby sees his chance in the handsome youth who comes backward and forward between the Duke and Olivia: this is of course the Viola of the main plot.[2] Sir Andrew is instantly given to understand that this youth is his rival.

> She did show favour to the youth in your sight only to exasperate you, to awake your dormouse valour, to put fire in your heart, and brimstone in your liver. You should then have accosted her; and with some excellent jests, fire-new from the mint, you should have banged the youth into dumbness. This was looked for at your hand, and this was balked: the double gilt of this opportunity you let time wash off, and you are now sailed into the north of my lady's opinion; where you will hang like an icicle on a Dutchman's beard, unless you do redeem it by some laudable attempt.

[1] II. iii, from 144.

[2] From III. ii.

Sir Andrew is worked up to the point of sending a challenge. The scheme is better than Sir Toby knows: the swagger of page-hood is easy to Viola as long as she is only a messenger, but, when it comes to fighting, the feminine that is inside the page exterior begins to quake. The fun goes merrily on: two parties are being drawn into a duel, each a coward at heart, each persuaded of the terrible rage and valour of the other, persuaded also that the only chance is to make some show of fight. But the joke is not all on one side: the twin brother of Viola appears, and Sir Andrew is valiant enough to strike him, with unlooked consequences to himself, and to Sir Toby who comes to his protégé's rescue.[1] In these representative personages the underplot is in full conflict with the main plot, and the entanglement crescendoes, until the dropping of Viola's disguise makes the general dénouement.

Thus in this play of *Twelfth Night* the ultimate elements of plot are a number of single stories, each complicated and resolved; these fall into two distinct systems of stories, main and subordinate, and each system shows a clash and disentanglement of the stories of which it is made up; finally there is a clash between these clashing systems of stories, before the final disentanglement is reached.

More briefly, in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*,[2] may be sketched another illustration of such complication of complication. Here we have a primary and a secondary plot. The primary plot is a clash of triple intrigues. One is Falstaff's intrigue against the merry wives: this must be taken as a single action, because Sir John's impudence goes so far as to use the same letter for both, with nothing but the names different. This intrigue is crossed by two others: one is the retribution of the wives, for Mistress Page and Mistress Ford have compared their letters, and join in a common revenge; the other is the deep scheme of the jealous Ford to facilitate Falstaff's pursuit until the guilty parties can be detected. The whole primary plot is thus a clash of intrigues in

[1] IV. ii, from 25; V. i, from 175.

[2] Compare below, page 343.

corrupt wooing. For the secondary plot we have natural wooing: not only is it innocent, but it is the love of youth and maid. There are three suits for the hand of Anne Page: Slender's suit is backed by Anne's father, with a view to the union of estates; Dr. Caius's suit is backed by Anne's mother, money being the motive; Fenton's suit is backed by Anne herself, for it is a case of true love. As three rivals are seeking the same girl the secondary plot (like the primary) is necessarily a clashing of three intrigues. All these separate interests are being carried on together, until in the end the one system is brought into conflict with the other. The wives of the primary plot, now in full reconcilement with their husbands, launch one more device against Falstaff: he is to be enticed to Windsor Park at night, and set upon by young people in guise of fairies. But in the details of this device the plotters part company: Anne's father will utilise the masquerade in order to have Anne carried off by the suitor he favours; unknown to the father, her mother arranges a similar scheme in favour of her candidate; Fenton has a plan of his own.[1] In the sequel the primary and secondary plots are seen to meet in this common climax of the masquerade; by the personages of the secondary plot the hero of the main plot has been put to final discomfiture, the vast bulk of him pinched and burnt by the young fairies with their tapers. But this triumph of the primary plot has reacted on the secondary plot, and disentangled the intrigues for Anne by giving her to her own lover. The mutual disentanglement is emphatic, as the discomfited Falstaff has his laugh against the irate father and mother:[2] all agree to be reconciled and make a night of it.

Here then is the first of the two elements which make up the Shakespearean conception of comedy. All through previous dramatic development the word 'comedy' has been drawing nearer and nearer to the word 'story': Shakespeare's comedies are harmonies of stories. The harmony is again found to be intensification of story interest. The simple sequence of events that is sufficient

[1] *Merry Wives* IV. iv, vi. [2] V. v. fin.

to make a story is intensified when the events move through the stages of complication and resolution; in Shakespeare a number of these complicated stories will be complicated into a mutual clash and disentanglement; systems of such clashing stories are still further carried to fresh clash and disentanglement. As a mathematical quantity is raised to a higher power by being multiplied into itself, and multiplied again and yet again, so by successive complications of complications Shakespearean comedy intensifies interest of story to the highest point which artistic receptiveness can endure.

The second main element of Shakespearean comedy is due to the survival of what has entered into comedy in the various phases of it that preceded Shakespeare. A drama is a spectacle, and a spectacle implies a spectator: all that is presented is arranged with a view to the appeal it will make to the spectator's emotional nature. In various periods comedy has made its appeal to the emotions in various ways. Even in primitive comedy the sympathies were drawn out in different directions: they must come into touch with fun and abandon, with biting satire, with broad farce and caricature. When Attic Comedy added its choral lyrics, appeal was made to opposite sympathies at the same time, to the ludicrous and to the serious. Now, a convenient word to express these diverse appeals to the spectator's emotional sympathies is the word *tones*. Instinctively the mind forms a scale of these tones, like a musical scale: interest of story may be taken as the indifference point — since this is an intellectual and not an emotional interest — and on either side of this middle point we have tones rising to the tragic, sinking to wild abandon.

Tragic
Serious
Fancy
Interest of Story (emotionally indifferent)
Wit
Ludicrous
Satire and Caricature
Fun and Abandon

Different analysts would construct their scale differently; perhaps no two would agree entirely in their definitions of such words as 'fancy' and 'ludicrous.' But this makes no difficulty: precise analysis is out of place where the question is of so fluent a thing as the emotional effect of a spectacle on a spectator. It is enough to lay down the general conception of a scale of tones, with higher and lower as more serious and less serious. In this sense comedy through large part of its history has exhibited a mixture of tones. But Shakespeare goes beyond mixture: we may lay it down as the second element in the Shakespearean conception that *Comedy is a harmony of tones*. It is not enough to say that there is no obstacle to the mingling of serious and light matter: the impression given is that a blending of tones into a harmony is a fundamental part of the whole design.

Sometimes this harmony takes the form of balance: for the higher tone found in one part of the play an equipoise is sought in the lower tone of another part. *The Taming of the Shrew*, with its elaborate crossing of love intrigues, leads us only a little way towards the serious side of life and character: accordingly this serious is sufficiently balanced in the underplot by the simple farce of the pert Grumio, in whom we have a reappearance of the Roman type of the saucy slave, joking his threadbare jokes and getting his conventional beating from his master. Similar intrigues in the *The Merry Wives* involve however a much deeper element of the serious in the brooding jealousies of Ford. To balance this we have, not one, but a whole chorus of caricatures: Shallow, the rustic magnate; Slender, the raw material of loutish shyness out of which such rustic importance is eventually made; Welsh parson Evans, with his chop-logic pedantry, and the fire-eating French doctor his antagonist; Pistol, all stage rant, his comrade Nym, all emphatic under-statement, with a third comrade, Bardolph, whose face is humour enough; mine host of the Garter Inn, with his gush of good fellowship, and his rôle of everybody's manager; Mistress Quickly, the go-between, brazen-faced in simplicity, with voluble inventiveness humouring everybody all round

for tips. It is another illustration of the same type, where we find the intricate tangle of love stories in *A Midsummer-Night's Dream* supported, on the one side by the exquisite fancies of fairy life, on the other side by the broadest farce of the clowns and their unconscious burlesque of *Pyramus and Thisbe*.

In other cases the effect is not so much the balancing of opposites, as the blending of several tones in a rich and full harmony. A perfect illustration is *Much Ado about Nothing:* here we have for complication a villanous intrigue that takes us to the very borders of the tragic; its resolution is in the farcical fussiness of Dogberry and Verges; while the intervals of the play — like the mean parts in a musical harmony — are filled up with a rich blend of wit and ludicrous situation, Benedick and Beatrice drawn railing into one another's arms.[1] In the preceding chapter we have seen how *Measure for Measure* works out a tragic situation in high life, throws over low life the clown-like humour of Pompey, and links the two together by the more polished humour of Lucio and the ludicrous irony of the situations into which his free tongue brings him. In *The Comedy of Errors* we see blended in harmony a serious element, the peril and release of Ægeon; the comedy of errors itself, with its ludicrous situations; and an underplot of mere farce, the Roman type of the impudent slave appearing once more. On precisely similar lines runs the play of *All's Well:* the character of Bertram in its eclipse and recovery is the serious action; the folly of Parolles and its exposure make the ludicrous tone; while in place of the Roman slave we have the clown his modern counterpart. Only a little different is *Twelfth Night,* where the highest tone is love fancy; the underplot is ludicrous exposure of folly; and the clown again makes a third tone, ingeniously brought into touch with every personage of the play. *The Merchant of Venice* travels far towards the tragic: this serious tone is supported by the ripple of wit running through the parts of Portia, Nerissa, Lorenzo, Gratiano, Launce-

[1] Compare the schemes of these plays in the Appendix.

lot; to make a fuller chord is added the single farcical touch of Launcelot's meeting with old Gobbo. Perhaps the fullest harmony of tones is to be found in *The Tempest*. We rise to the most exalted point of the serious when Prospero, temporarily omnipotent, wields dispensations of providence over "the three men of sin"; with this we blend the simple love interest of Ferdinand and Miranda; there is the sustained wit of Gonzalo and the courtiers who tease him; lowest of all we have the farcical business of the intoxicated sailors led in dread conspiracy by the fish-monster Caliban.

In some cases the emotional impression of a story cannot be conveyed by such simple terms as those that have made up our scale of tones; it is something complex and many-sided, and we sometimes seek to express it by speaking of the 'atmosphere' of the story. In such cases the harmony of tones will become — though the expression strains metaphor — a harmony of atmospheres. In a former chapter we have noted how, in *Winter's Tale*, as we pass from complication to resolution we meet a total change of spirit, from court life with high responsibility and grave sin to rustic simplicity and harmless roguery; in *Cymbeline* we noted a similar change from the atmosphere of the court to the open air life and the spirit of the cave and the mountain. Great part of *As You Like It* is confined within the Forest of Arden, and is the old conventional pastoral life, with such conventional loves as those of Silvius and Phœbe: a different atmosphere is brought to bear upon this as it is played upon by a triple humour — the natural humour of Rosalind, the professional humour of Touchstone, and the morbid humour of Jaques, whose carefully cultivated melancholy depreciates everything with a lurid brightness. In *Love's Labour's Lost* we have an atmosphere of the artificial: the artificial bond of the mutual vow, the artificial life of celibacy, the euphuism of Armado, and the equally artificial pedantry of Nathaniel and Holofernes. This appears as the local atmosphere of Navarre; the advent of the French princess and her suite, like a change of weather, brings in a new atmosphere of pure gay hu-

mour, and the impact of the one upon the other gives sustained coruscations of wit and fun.[1]

In this connection the comedy of *Two Gentlemen of Verona* needs fuller consideration. The reader of this play, upon the first perusal of it, may well be staggered at some of its departures from what is natural and probable; especially the climax up to which the whole movement leads, when the false Proteus makes love to the unwilling Silvia in the hearing of Valentine.[2] Valentine discovers himself, and taunts his friend with his perfidy; Proteus can only throw himself upon his friend's mercy; whereupon Valentine answers:

> Who by repentance is not satisfied
> Is nor of heaven nor earth, for these are pleased.
> By penitence the Eternal's wrath's appeased:
> And, that my love may appear plain and free,
> All that was mine in Silvia I give thee.

The forgiveness is all well and good: but what are we to say of the last line, in which the faithful Valentine bestows the equally faithful Silvia on the faithless friend? But further study of this drama illustrates a certain paradox of interpretation — that difficulties by multiplying may diminish. We find every portion of this play crowded with unrealities and improbabilities and artificialities, until we recognise at last that we are not in the ordinary world at all. Over the story has been thrown the atmosphere of the 'gay science' — the poetry of the troubadours and the courts of love: the conventional love literature from which love was the one thing absent; which ransacked ingenuity for conceits and riddles and twists and turns of mental fencing and word play, cast these into songs, or sonnets and 'passions,' and selected the nearest princess, or neighbour's wife, or little child, as an animated target against which to practise love-making, no more to be confused with a real object of passion than the dedicatee of an eighteenth-century book

[1] This feature of the two plays (*Love's Labour's Lost* and *As You Like It*) is treated at full length in my *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist:* Chapters XIV, XV.

[2] *Two Gentlemen:* V. iv, especially from 54.

is to be understood as its hero. Thus, in *Two Gentlemen*, no sooner have a few lines of natural writing brought out some necessary point in the action than the conversation will drift into a bout of wit-fencing, the chief goodness of the jests consisting in their badness.[1]

Proteus. For I will be thy beadsman, Valentine.
Valentine. And on a love-book pray for my success?
Proteus. Upon some book I love I'll pray for thee.
Valentine. That's on some shallow story of deep love:
How young Leander cross'd the Hellespont.
Proteus. That's a deep story of a deeper love;
For he was more than over shoes in love.
Valentine. 'Tis true; for you are over boots in love,
And yet you never swum the Hellespont.
Proteus. Over the boots? nay, give me not the boots.
Valentine. No, I will not, for it boots thee not.
Proteus. What?
Valentine. To be in love, where scorn is bought with groans;
Coy looks with heart-sore sighs; one fading moment's mirth
With twenty watchful, weary, tedious nights:
If haply won, perhaps a hapless gain;
If lost, why then a grievous labour won;
However, but a folly bought with wit,
Or else a wit by folly vanquished.
Proteus. So, by your circumstance, you call me fool.
Valentine. So, by your circumstance, I fear you'll prove.

Similarly, when a sentiment or a situation is to be expressed, the language regularly passes into the form of a sonnet, — not indeed the strict sonnet of fourteen lines, but such sonnet-like play of thought as would fit the passage for a place in the *Hekatompathia*.[2]

To leave my Julia, shall I be forsworn;
To love fair Silvia, shall I be forsworn;
To wrong my friend, I shall be much forsworn;

[1] I. i.

[2] II. vi. 1–30. For other examples compare I. ii. 105–29; II. iv. 129–42; II. vii. 24–38; III. i. 140–51 and 171–87; III. ii. 73–87 (note line 69).

> And even that power which gave me first my oath
> Provokes me to this three-fold perjury;
> Love bade me swear and Love bids me forswear.
> O sweet-suggesting Love, if thou hast sinn'd,
> Teach me, thy tempted subject, to excuse it!
> At first I did adore a twinkling star,
> But now I worship a celestial sun.
> Unheedful vows may heedfully be broken;
> And he wants wit that wants resolved will
> To learn his wit to exchange the bad for better.
> Fie, fie, unreverend tongue! to call her bad,
> Whose sovereignty so oft thou hast preferr'd
> With twenty thousand soul-confirming oaths.
> I cannot leave to love, and yet I do;
> But there I leave to love where I should love.
> Julia I lose and Valentine I lose:
> If I keep them, I needs must lose myself;
> If I lose them, thus find I by their loss
> For Valentine myself, for Julia Silvia,
> I to myself am dearer than a friend,
> For love is still most precious in itself;
> And Silvia — witness Heaven, that made her fair! —
> Shows Julia but a swarthy Ethiope.
> I will forget that Julia is alive,
> Remembering that my love to her is dead;
> And Valentine I'll hold an enemy,
> Aiming at Silvia as a sweeter friend.

When we have our minds thoroughly saturated with this atmosphere of the gay science, we shall feel no difficulty even in the climax of the play. To weigh in the scales of sentiment the mistress and the friend is precisely the sort of knotty question which the courts of love would poetically take up; and a pleasant judicature — which considered it a contradiction in terms for a man to be in love with his own wife — would be as likely as not, in the present issue, to sacrifice love on the altar of friendship.

It remains to point out that in this play, as in those previously noted, we have a balance of atmospheres. The two gentlemen

have their two servants: the comparatively heavy atmosphere of euphuistic conceit is contrasted with the light farcical humour of the stable and servant's hall. Speed and Launce have their bouts of wit. Where Speed banters his love-lorn master we seem to realise that there might be such a thing as a prose sonnet.

> *Valentine.* Why, how know you that I am in love?
>
> *Speed.* Marry, by these special marks: first, you have learned, like Sir Proteus, to wreathe your arms, like a malecontent; to relish a love-song, like a robin-redbreast; to walk alone, like one that had the pestilence; to sigh, like a school-boy that had lost his A B C; to weep, like a young wench that had buried her grandam; to fast, like one that takes diet; to watch, like one that fears robbing; to speak puling, like a beggar at Hallowmas. You were wont, when you laughed, to crow like a cock; when you walked, to walk like one of the lions; when you fasted, it was presently after dinner; when you looked sadly, it was for want of money: and now you are metamorphosed with a mistress, that, when I look on you, I can hardly think you my master.[1]

More than this, the devotion which the gentlemen pour out upon their supreme mistresses Launce reserves for his dog. He takes his pet's unsavoury offence upon himself, and is whipped in his stead;[2] yet, like his master, he has to mourn hard-heartedness in the object of his affections.

> I think Crab my dog be the sourest-natured dog that lives: my mother weeping, my father wailing, my sister crying, our maid howling, our cat wringing her hands, and all our house in a great perplexity, yet did not this cruel-hearted cur shed one tear: he is a stone, a very pebble-stone, and has no more pity in him than a dog: a Jew would have wept to have seen our parting; why, my grandam, having no eyes, look you, wept herself blind at my parting. Nay, I'll show you the manner of it. This shoe is my father: no, this left shoe is my father: no, no, this left shoe is my mother: nay, that cannot be so neither: yes, it is so, it is so, it hath the worser sole . . .

[1] II. i, from 17.

[2] IV. iv.

> Now, sir, this staff is my sister, for, look you, she is as white as a lily, and as small as a wand: this hat is Nan, our maid: I am the dog: no, the dog is himself, and I am the dog—Oh! the dog is me, and I am myself; ay, so, so. Now come I to my father; Father, your blessing: now should not the shoe speak a word for weeping: now should I kiss my father; well, he weeps on. Now come I to my mother: O, that she could speak now like a wood woman! Well, I kiss her, why, there 'tis; here's my mother's breath up and down. Now come I to my sister; mark the moan she makes. Now the dog all this while sheds not a tear, nor speaks a word; but see how I lay the dust with my tears.[1]

The balancing of atmosphere with atmosphere can hardly go further than when tours-de-force of doggie sentiment are used to counterpoise high-flown sentimentalism of the gay science.

Under these two heads then may be formulated the Shakespearean conception of comedy: story raised to its highest power of complexity, and the harmony of tones. Comedy so constituted stands in a clear relation to the moral order of the universe. It presents life in equilibrium: every intricacy of complication fitted with its due resolution, as when musical discords melt into concords; the higher tones of our nature supported by or blended with the lower tones in full emotional harmony. And the correlative conception is at once suggested, that in tragedy we have equilibrium overthrown. This last is the subject of the chapter that follows.

[1] II. iii.

IX

TRAGEDY AS EQUILIBRIUM OVERTHROWN

The received classification of Shakespeare's plays is positive as regards comedies. Between tragedies and histories the line is difficult to draw, and the terms are not mutually exclusive. The relation of the histories to the moral system of Shakespeare will appear in connection with another part of this work:[1] the immediate question is as to the Shakespearean conception of tragedy. It has been in the main anticipated by the discussion of the preceding chapter.

Shakespeare, we have seen, represents romantic drama: the union of drama and romance. The latter term must be stretched to include the chronicle histories, and such a work as Plutarch; these are treated in the same spirit as the ordinary story books of romance, for of history in the modern scientific sense there was no thought. By the other component element, drama, is meant the revived dramatic literature of Greece and Rome. There was of course a Mediæval Drama — of miracle plays, mysteries, moralities, interludes, histories —which extended into the Shakespearean age; and there is evidence that some of its histories were utilised as materials for the preparation of Shakespearean dramas. But this does not alter the fact that, considered as a species in literature, the Shakespearean drama made a fresh start, under the inspiration of the revived classical dramas and the accumulated stores of romance. I do not mean to suggest that the Mediæval Drama was entirely without influence on the coming drama of the Renaissance: but the influence was of an indirect kind. It may be said indeed that the Mediæval is an anticipation of the Romantic Drama. Part

[1] Chapter XIII.

of the wealth of story accumulated in the age of romance consisted in sacred story — the narrative of the Bible and the lives of the saints; to act these sacred stories for a populace that could not read them was the original purpose of the miracle plays, however much they may have widened their design subsequently. Thus the essence of the Mediæval, as of the Romantic Drama, was the application of dramatic form to story material, the story being of at least equal importance with the dramatic effects. The influence of audiences trained for generations in dramatised story by the miracle plays, and similar shows, was a powerful bulwark to the poets of the Romantic Drama, in their struggle against a criticism that would have subjected the stage again to the limitations of pre-romance drama. Without ignoring then this influence of the Mediæval Drama we may nevertheless say that the Romantic Drama of Shakespeare has its roots in ancient drama and in romance; in these two directions we are to look if we are inquiring what may be expected to enter into the Shakespearean conception of tragedy.

In Greek literature tragedy and comedy were distinct, and tragedy was 'serious' drama. The popular idea that a tragedy is a play which ends unhappily, as opposed to comedies with their happy endings, will not bear confronting with the masterpieces of antiquity. Æschylus's *Trilogy of Orestes* ends with Orestes delivered and the magnificent festival of the Eumenides; the *Œdipus at Colonus* of Sophocles, after heart-rending spectacles of suffering, displays the exaltation of its hero; no play could have a happier ending than the *Alcestis* of Euripides: yet all these are tragedies. It was not the nature of the movement, but the serious tone that made a tragedy to the Greeks. It could hardly be other than serious, for Greek tragedy was a religious service, commencing with ritual at the altar of Dionysus; the choral odes led the thoughts of the audience in religious meditation, like the anthems and hymns of a modern choir; the acted scenes were sacred myths, like the acted sermon of the miracle play. The criticism of the age laid its emphasis on this serious character of

tragedy, in Aristotle's definition of it as imitation of a "worthy, illustrious, perfect" action; he makes its moral purpose that of purifying the emotions of pity and terror. Close analysis may detect, especially in plays of Euripides, some appearance of lighter matter as relief; but to the end of the ancient literature the conception of tragedy was sufficiently defined by its sombre tone.

It was under the influence of romance that the original conception came to be modified. We have seen in the preceding chapter how the words tragedy and comedy were used of the narrated stories of the dark ages; how in the freedom of minstrel narration some rapprochement took place between the two terms, tragedy admitting more of the comic and comedy more of the tragic. What is more important than this, we have seen how, towards the close of the dark ages, a turn of fashion in popular taste produced a literary impulse of long continuance, destined to influence more than anything else the conception of tragedy in the future. A single type of serious story predominated over all others. From the time of Henry of Huntingdon in the twelfth century, and his *Contempt of the World*, there appeared collections of tragedies the interest of which lay in presenting the illustrious of mankind falling into ruin or obscurity; such writers as Boccaccio, with his *De Casibus Illustrium Virorum*, and Lydgate, with his *Falls of Princes*, made their contributions to this popular form of literature. The hold which this type of tragedy had on the public mind even in the Elizabethan age is evidenced by the number of successive works which bear the common title of *A Mirror for Magistrates;* to one of the series splendid contributions were made by the Sackville who, in *Gorboduc*, is recognised as one of the fathers of our modern drama. Thus tragedy came into the age of Shakespeare with this special connotation of fallen greatness; it is serious story with a tendency to a single type of seriousness. As comedy has enlarged to the general presentation of life in equilibrium, so tragedy has specialised to the conception of equilibrium overthrown. A tragedy is, to Shakespeare's audience and to Shakespeare, a story of a fall.

Sometimes in Shakespearean tragedy we have the career and the fall of an evildoer; scarcely any other motive will be found to underlie the play of *Richard the Second.* Elsewhere the plot is made by the fall of many: as we observe the career of Richard the Third, we see his life an agency of doom to all around him, in his death he himself becomes a victim. In such a play as *Romeo and Juliet* the tragedy lies in the fall of the innocent. Yet another variety appears in *Lear* or *Othello:* the hero is here great and noble, the tragic interest lies in watching how, in the mysteries of providence, the small sin or omission overbalances the general nobility, and there is the same end of ruin. In other cases the idea of the outer and the inner life comes in: for the various personages of *Henry the Eighth* the fall in the world without is a rise in the life within; even in *Antony and Cleopatra* something of a higher life is seen to spring up amid the ruin of a righteous doom. But in all cases alike, what we see of fall is a fall from which there is no recovery; tragedy is a complication never to be resolved.

In the case of comedy the equilibrium appeared, not only in the movement of the story, which balanced complication with resolution, but also in the balance and harmony of light and serious tones. The converse applies to Shakespearean tragedy: in tone, as well as in movement, equilibrium is overthrown. The mixture of tones in tragedy is no balance: the serious preponderates altogether over the light, is intensified the more because of the presence of this lighter matter. It is a fundamental principle of our mental economy, that the stronger emotions are soon exhausted into apathy; those dramatists will draw the most of pity and terror out of us who know how, at the proper points, to relieve this pity and terror with opposite tones of feeling. The more Shakespeare's dramas are examined, the more evident it will be that the principle of relief is the law underlying the mixture of tones in tragedy.

In the tragedy of *Richard the Second* no relief appears in the form of humorous matter; possibly we may see it in the spectacu-

lar interest of the trial by combat. Such interest is found on a much larger scale in the successive pageants of *Henry the Eighth*, which however take that play out of the category of tragedy, and make it a complex form of drama.[1] The fun and abandon which made the earliest spirit of comedy have their nearest modern counterpart in the clown: the all-licensed jester, for whom ordinary social proprieties are suspended, who may, and must, twist fun for us out of everything and out of nothing. The Clown is actually introduced, with all his laboured fooling, into *Othello:* his two brief appearances[2] make two breathing spaces for us in the oppressive crescendo of passion. What essentially is the same effect appears in *Macbeth:* the jesting of the professional fool is put into the mouth of the Porter; and his light badinage, standing between the horror of murder and the shock of discovery, has the effect of the single flash of lightning that blackens the night.[3] In *Titus Andronicus* is a slighter device of the same kind: the only relief to the accumulating horrors is the rustic stupidity of a messenger, who is called 'clown' in the other sense of the word.[4] There is again a group of tragedies in which the spirit of the professional clown is read into one of the leading personages of the story. In *King John* the earlier appearances of Faulconbridge strike us in this vein; nothing can be more clown-like than his reiteration to the pompous Duke of the line[5]—

> And hang a calf's-skin on those recreant limbs.

But as the tragedy progresses the tone of relief melts out of the personality of Faulconbridge, and he becomes a grave and strenuous statesman. *Timon of Athens* has for relief element the misanthropic humour of Apemantus, called in the list of personages 'a churlish philosopher'; *Coriolanus* similarly has Menenius, with his spleenful mockery of the populace and its leaders; in *Julius Cæsar* somewhat of the same tone is put into the mouths of the

[1] See above, pages 89–92.
[2] *Othello* III. i and iv.
[3] *Macbeth* II. iii.
[4] *Titus* IV. iii, iv.
[5] *King John* III. i. 131, 133, 199, 220, 299.

mob; in *Antony and Cleopatra* Enobarbus is the 'plain' speaker, until his cynicism is melted away by the tragic situation: all these are but examples of the relief element of the clown drawn within the personalities of the story. It may be added that in *Richard the Third* the relief seems to be the grim humour of the hero in the midst of his devilry, until he loses his equanimity in the toils of fate. In *Romeo and Juliet* the relieving wit is distributed through the parts of Mercutio, the Nurse, and the Musicians: it has all disappeared before the final climax.

In two of Shakespeare's most famous tragedies the relief element is of a much more elaborate kind. If analysis be applied to the fooling of the Shakespearean jester a leading element will be found to be the incongruity and incoherence of its matter, in this case of course intentional incoherence. But the unconscious incoherence of a disordered brain may be used with somewhat of the same effect. It has been contended indeed that there is a real difference of sympathetic temperament between an Elizabethan and a modern audience; that the symptoms of madness which are so pathetic to us were to our ancestors simply funny. However this may be, it is clear that the wildness of insanity is used in Shakespeare's plays as a variation and relief to tragedy. A masterly example of this usage is seen in *King Lear*. As the old man's brain begins to break down under his daughters' unkindness, he passes first into the stage of hysteria.

> O, how this mother swells up toward my heart!
> Hysterica passio, down, thou climbing sorrow,
> Thy element's below.[1]

Later his words and actions are helpless insanity.

> O, matter and impertinency mix'd!
> Reason in madness![2]

Side by side with this insanity we have the feigned idiotcy of Edgar: sometimes meaningless nonsense, sometimes approaching the mocking nonsense of the typical clown.

[1] *Lear* II. iv. 56. [2] IV. vi. 178.

Lear. What hast thou been?

Edgar. A serving-man, proud in heart and mind; that curled my hair; wore gloves in my cap; served the lust of my mistress' heart, and did the act of darkness with her; swore as many oaths as I spake words, and broke them in the sweet face of heaven: one that slept in the contriving of lust, and waked to do it: wine loved I deeply, dice dearly; and in woman out-paramoured the Turk: false of heart, light of ear, bloody of hand; hog in sloth, fox in stealth, wolf in greediness, dog in madness, lion in prey. Let not the creaking of shoes nor the rustling of silks betray thy poor heart to woman: keep thy foot out of brothels, thy hand out of plackets, thy pen from lender's books, and defy the foul fiend.

Still through the hawthorn blows the cold wind.
Says suum, mun, ha, no, nonny.
Dolphin, my boy, my boy, sessa! let him trot by.[1]

When a third type of nonsense — the regular clown or jester — is added we get, through the central scenes of *King Lear*, a trio of madnesses — real, assumed, professional — mingling their incoherent ravings: a fourth form of wildness, the raging of the tempest outside, plays a dreadful accompaniment. So complex is the relief element in this tragedy.

An equally elaborate treatment of relief is found in *Hamlet*. As a first element we have the assumed madness of Hamlet himself. Hamlet is never mad: the poet's treatment is so clear on this point that I can only express astonishment that any different view should have crept into criticism. At the beginning of the story, even before the excitement of the Ghost Scene, the hero appears as a man of bitter irony, veiling a tone of feeling with an opposite tone of expression.

Horatio. My lord, I came to see your father's funeral.
Hamlet. I pray thee, do not mock me, fellow-student;
I think it was to see my mother's wedding.

[1] III. iv. 87.

Horatio. Indeed, my lord, it follow'd close upon.
Hamlet. Thrift, thrift, Horatio ! the funeral baked-meats
Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables.[1]

When suddenly has come the shock of a revelation — a revelation of horror taking the dubious form of a communication from the supernatural world — it is small wonder that a man of this temperament should be driven for a moment to hysteric irony.

O villain, villain, smiling, damned villain !
My tables, — meet it is I set it down,
That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain.[2]

In this mood Hamlet is rejoined by his comrades[3]: when he sees the astonishment on their faces at his own wild irony, his quick mind catches the thought of using this hysteric mockery as a stalking-horse behind which he may watch the dreadful situation until he can see how to act. He not only so resolves, but he takes his comrades into his confidence.

But come;
Here, as before, never, so help you mercy,
How strange or odd soe'er I bear myself,
As I perchance hereafter shall think meet
To put an antic disposition on,
That you, at such times seeing me, never shall
With arms encumber'd thus, or this head-shake,
Or by pronouncing of some doubtful phrase,
As 'Well, well we know,' or 'we could, an if we would,'
Or, 'If we list to speak,' or 'There be, an if they might,'
Or such ambiguous giving out, to note
That you know aught of me: this not to do,
So grace and mercy at your most need help you,
Swear.[4]

The scenes that follow are a simple carrying out of this plan: like the original Brutus, Hamlet hides behind an "antic dispo-

[1] *Hamlet* I. ii. 176.
[2] I. v. 106.
[3] I. v, from III.
[4] I. v. 168.

sition" while he waits his chance to act; at any moment he can drop his assumed wildness.

> *Hamlet.* You are welcome: but my uncle-father and aunt-mother are deceived.
>
> *Guildenstern.* In what, my dear lord?
>
> *Hamlet.* I am but mad north-north-west: when the wind is southerly I know a hawk from a handsaw.[1]

This madness of Hamlet then, assumed for a specific purpose in the movement of the story, serves also as relief: the hysterical incoherence of the supposed madman is used to mock king and courtier, and to mock even Ophelia herself, whom in the general hollowness of all appearances Hamlet has come to doubt. With this is combined, as in *Lear*, another form of relief, the real madness of Ophelia, so piteous in its incoherences. Nor is this all. It must be remembered that the essential idea of relief in tragedy is not necessarily the mingling of comic with serious: any other variation of emotional tone may serve, if it is used to break the sustained sense of movement towards a tragic climax. Such an emotional break may be found in the uncanny thrill of the Ghost Scenes, varying the gloomy with touches of the horrible. I would recognise another variation in the simulated passion of the actors; this is an effect more obvious on the stage than in the mere reading of the drama, and Hamlet himself seems to note something of the kind.

> *Hamlet.* Is it not monstrous that this player here,
> But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
> Could force his soul so to his own conceit
> That from her working all his visage wann'd;
> Tears in his eyes, distraction in's aspect,
> A broken voice, and his whole function suiting
> With forms to his conceit? and all for nothing![2]

Finally, in the fifth act we have the regular agency of relief, the clown, varied into the form of grave-diggers, and professional jest-

[1] II. ii. 387. [2] II. ii. 576.

ing is turned upon the most gruesome of topics. If this analysis be correct, we seem in the play of *Hamlet* to have an underplot of relief matter, appearing successively in five varied forms: the supernatural awe of the Ghost Scenes, the hysteric mockery of Hamlet, the histrionic passion of the players, the pathetic madness of Ophelia, and the weird humour of the grave-diggers.

Thus it appears that, as the movement of tragedy in Shakespeare is a fall from greatness, so in its tone it rests upon an overbalancing of emotions: light and dark do not mingle on equal terms, but the serious is relieved only that it may thereby be the more intensified. In all respects Shakespearean comedy and Shakespearean tragedy are the converse one of the other, as moral equilibrium and equilibrium overthrown. In comedy we watch human life plunged it may be in a sea of troubles, sure that natural buoyancy will bring it again to the surface, with an exhilaration akin to laughter. In tragedy we see human life mounting, but with an impulse that has disturbed some secret moral gravitation, that will make the height of the elevation only the measure of the fall.

X

THE MORAL SIGNIFICANCE OF HUMOUR

A STORY is told of a man who, being suddenly called upon to say exactly what was meant by humour, reserved his definition till the next day; the next day he found he would require a week, at the end of a week, a month; by that time the subject had so grown upon him that he went into the country for a whole year to think it out; at the end of the year he sold his business, and announced his intention of devoting the rest of his life to this one question: shortly afterward the man died of melancholy. Humour is a thing of so strange a nature that he who has most of it can least say what it is; while those who altogether lack it — and they are not a few — have the advantage of never knowing their loss. Yet this difficult subject cannot be altogether ignored in the present work, as a single illustration will show. Falstaff, the supreme humorous creation of Shakespeare, is exhibited as violating every law of righteousness and beauty: we who read love Falstaff, yet in no way lessen our love of law. This contradiction of itself makes humour a problem in the moral system of Shakespeare. It can be treated only in the way of suggestion.

Some light, though of an uncertain kind, may be thrown upon the thing from the word that conveys it. In its ultimate etymology the meaning of humour is simply moisture. The great extension of its import rests upon a physiological theory of the Middle Ages, which made the various juices of the body the determining forces of character; the blood, phlegm, choler inside the human frame made a man sanguine, phlegmatic, choleric;

the arrangement of these juices or humours was his 'disposition,' and if they were well mixed he was 'good tempered'; the visible sign of such mixture in his face was his 'complexion,' a word which, as late as the novels of Richardson, was synonymous with character. Accordingly 'humour' was applied to the whole, or the separate elements, of a man's character; the usage of Ben Jonson, with his *Every Man in his Humour* and *Every Man out of his Humour*, at once reflected and intensified the tendency to apply the term 'humours' to peculiarities of individual disposition. Now, such individual peculiarities are a great source of the ludicrous; again, the incongruities or hidden congruities in human nature, like other incongruities or congruities, are a leading subject for wit to play upon. Thus the whole range of human nature, of wit, and of the ludicrous, are all drawn within the scope of this single word 'humour.' But in the shiftings to and fro of verbal usage so many-sided a word was sure to become specialised more or less. On the one side, wit begins to draw away from humour by suggesting the cold intellectual appreciation of singularities, while humour is the emotion excited by them. At another point, such things as scorn and satire become differentiated by the fact that, while aiming at the ridiculous, they also imply hostility; it is the great note of humour, on the contrary, that it does not lose sympathy with what it ridicules, and a man is never more humorous than when he enjoys a laugh at his own expense. But the sympathetic sense of the ludicrous, which is the specialty of humour, is free to range over the whole of human nature, until, in the humour of Thackeray or Bret Harte, we often laugh only to keep from crying. To all of which it may be added, that the original signification of the word has never been altogether lost, and humour is always the most fluent of all the emotions that have connection with the ludicrous.

As a technical term of the drama, the meaning of humour can be stated with more precision. It can be approached through a series of steps, of which the first step is the conception of dra-

matic tone. We must go back to first principles. Drama is not a mere reproduction of real life, but is life arranged as a spectacle. If we turn a mirror upon a landscape, we do not get a picture: what we see lacks composition and its perspective. There is a similar perspective in drama; what is presented is disposed according to the point of view of the spectator, and to produce effects in his emotional nature. The emotions in the scene may be the same as the emotion to be excited in the spectator, or they may be very different; on the stage two men are seen flying at one another's throats, with a woman standing by and wringing her hands in despair, and all the while the spectator of the play is smiling at a comic situation. The term expressing this emotional response in the spectator of the drama is 'tone.' Without seeking to define these tones — of comic, farcical, tragic, and the like — we have seen that it is natural to conceive a scale of tones, the more serious taking place as higher, the less serious as lower. Now the foe of tone is monotone and satiety. Even in real life it is a fundamental principle of psychology that the passive receiving of impressions without any reaction in activity is dangerous; if we listen Sunday after Sunday to appeals from the pulpit without attempting to act upon them, our religious exercises have only made us the more callous; if we for ever cherish sentiments without any effect on our conduct, we dwindle into the sentimental. But the spectator in the theatre is necessarily passive: if one kind of emotional appeal is continuously made to him without variation, he must soon become apathetic. Hence the mixture of tones in the romantic drama: comedy balancing a succession of different emotions into harmony, even tragedy relieving its serious tone by what is lighter. From this mixture of tones we may go a step farther, and recognise what may be called tone-clash: opposite emotions meet with a shock in the same effect. In the physical body such a clash of opposites makes hysteria: the mobile nervous energy relieves itself by laughter and tears together. So, as we have seen, outpourings of an hysteric

character make an element in the excited action of Lear and Hamlet. Or again, tone-clash is illustrated in the regular custom of Shakespeare to use puns in passages of deep emotion; as where John of Gaunt, dying of grief, receives the nephew who is the cause of it with a string of puns on his own name.[1] Criticism has often taken objection, on the ground that puns are things comic in their nature. But it is their comic character that gives them fitness, not for ordinary situations of sadness, but for agony that is acute: puns in such cases are verbal hysterics. From these successive conceptions — of dramatic tones, scale of tones, mixture of tones, tone-clash — we may proceed to the final conception of humour as tone-tremulousness, like the shake in music; there is no clash or shock, but diverse or opposite emotions come so smoothly together that they flow into a single delightful impression. We are amused at the violation of the law, and yet are conscious of retaining our respect for the law; we enjoy Falstaff's humiliation, yet have no sense of triumph over the man; we appreciate the grotesque in the Dogberries and Shallows, yet do not cease to feel that they are men and brethren. As a supreme effect for the management of tone in drama, the fluency of humour holds contrasted emotions harmonised in the spectator's sympathy.

The humour, the dramatic expression of which is thus described, has a natural place in a moral system. It enters deeply into the real life which it is the province of drama to arrange. Humour is an emotional antiseptic: the salt of wit keeps sentiment healthy, saves it from the morbid, makes itself felt just where the sweet is in danger of becoming the mawkish. It is the balance-wheel of the sympathies: every feeling indulged is at the expense of other feelings, and tends toward partisanship; in the rapid interplay of emotions humour is the force that staves off an eccentricity which would disturb regularity. The

[1] *Richard the Second* II. i. 74–85. For other examples compare *Julius Cæsar* III. i. 204–208; *Merchant of Venice* IV. i. 281; *Macbeth* II. ii. 56; *Richard the Second* IV. i. 315.

heart of a whirlpool is a dead calm: humour is such an indifference point in the whirlpool of the passions. It serves as a sounding-board for taste: without it the loud ring of excess comes back only in mocking echoes. Humour thus enters deeply into analysis of character. Greek thought deified the sense of proportion as a moral force under the name Nemesis: other powers, like Justice, dealt with right and wrong, but Nemesis was a providence which visited every kind of excess, which would strike down a Polycrates for being too fortunate, or an Hippolytus for being too temperate. Humour is such a nemesis in human character, watching over the proportion of parts, interposing to save the 'good' from becoming 'goody.' It must be understood of course in all these remarks that the essential thing is not humour, but the sense of humour; the question is not of jocose expression, but of the mental corrective force that lies in an instinct against excess. Humour is thus the great contribution of comedy to morals; it is a sort of comic conscience, ever making for moral equilibrium.

When life comes to be arranged as a dramatic spectacle the scope of humour is still further enlarged. It may sometimes manifest itself as a suspension of the moral law, in the way that enchantment is a suspension of physical law. This temporary suspension of moral law is a deep-seated idea in human nature. In ruder times it manifested itself in such forms as the Roman Saturnalia, or mediæval Feasts of Unreason; the powers of order were tolerant of the single day in the year when slaves might whip masters, or a mock pope travesty sacred ritual — rude expressions of a vague popular conception that even God must sometimes need a holiday. The more refined fluency of humour can infuse into regular life a single element of the moral Saturnalia; relieving pompous history with by-play of an East-cheap, bad enough as a reality, but excellent as a spectacle. Falstaff's tavern bill with its "one half-pennyworth of bread to this intolerable deal of sack" typifies the proportions of the responsible and the frothy in this humorous unreason. Flashes

from Falstaff himself are continually keeping us in touch with the idea of moral reversal; as where the disgruntled pedestrian threatens "to turn true man and leave these rogues"; or where he laments the evil times:

> There live not three good men unhanged in England: and one of them is fat, and grows old: God help the while! a bad world, I say.

The moral topsy-turveydom of Eastcheap has reached the point of paradox.

> *Poins.* Jack! how agrees the devil and thee about thy soul, that thou soldest him on Good Friday last for a cup of Madeira and a cold capon's leg?
>
> *Prince.* Sir John stands to his word, the devil shall have his bargain; for he was never yet a breaker of proverbs: he will give the devil his due.
>
> *Poins.* Then art thou damned for keeping thy word with the devil.
>
> *Prince.* Else he had been damned for cozening the devil.

Thus the immorality has become a new morality, and Falstaff turns moraliser. He gives us a long and ingenious sermon on the moral effects of sherry, which a teetotaller may admire as an heresiarch's masterpiece.[1] The doctrine of original sin becomes a comfort to him.

> Dost thou hear, Hal? thou knowest in the state of innocency Adam fell; and what should poor Jack Falstaff do in the days of villany? Thou seest I have more flesh than another man; and therefore more frailty.

We even hear him solemnly discoursing on the vanity of life: only he means, the life of honour.

> *Prince.* Why, thou owest God a death.
>
> *Falstaff.* 'Tis not due yet; I would be loth to pay him before his day. What need I be so forward with him that

[1] *Second Part of Henry the Fourth:* IV. iii, from 92.

> calls not on me? Well, 'tis no matter; honour pricks me on. Yea, but how if honour prick me off when I come on? how then? Can honour set to a leg? no: or an arm? no: or take away the grief of a wound? no. Honour hath no skill in surgery, then? no. What is honour? a word. What is in that word honour? what is that honour? air. A trim reckoning! Who hath it? he that died o' Wednesday. Doth he feel it? no. Doth he hear it? no. 'Tis insensible, then. Yea, to the dead. But will it not live with the living? no. Why? detraction will not suffer it. Therefore I'll none of it. Honour is a mere scutcheon: and so ends my catechism.

Humour is often occupied with the ways of human nature. Zoology gravely studies the ways of animals: not merely the structures of their skeletons as an element in comparative anatomy, but the lightest turn of habit and custom, as that one spider spreads a web, another lives in a box with a lid to it. The ways of the animal man have a similar interest, even the infinite variations of individuality: how carriers talk with ostlers in free slang; how a tavern hostess adapts herself to impracticable guests; distracted drawers flinging 'anons' in every direction; what permutations of the human scarecrow can be mustered into Falstaff's company of soldiers; what combinations of social absurdities can hold revel in Shallow's orchard. In a Doll Tearsheet wit can turn its light upon the crudest humanity, as pictorial art can give us a Dutch genre picture. Mine host's practical joke in the *Merry Wives* is a zoological experiment that brings the oddities of a parson Evans and a Doctor Caius into just the best situation for fully displaying themselves. And Prince Henry is a diligent zoological observer, who can reproduce "all humours that have showed themselves humours since the old days of goodman Adam to the pupil age of this present twelve o'clock at midnight."

But besides these indifferent things vice itself may be a spectacle; there is an interest of monstrosity in morals, as in art the grotesque is a form of beauty. The sins of the nursery have to be restrained, because they are great things to the little sinners:

but, once the nursery door is closed, the adult spectator has his keen enjoyment of the joke. So at the other end of the scale, vice passes beyond the danger point, and becomes nothing but spectacle. Only, the perspective of the picture must be so arranged that the spectator really is at the indifference point; criticism cannot say how this is to be done, any more than it can direct a portrait painter how to catch a likeness, yet to miss this is to make art immoral. Dramatised vice is a demonstration in moral pathology. In physiology, the disease which may be fatal to the individual patient becomes a thing of cool interest to the medical expert, who rather prefers a compound fracture to a sprain, and may become enthusiastic over the virulent destructiveness of a cancerous tissue. There is nothing strange in this, for disease is a manifestation of life as much as health. But the doctors watching their pathological curiosities in the fever hospital take measures to guard themselves from infection. So humour is the great moral disinfectant, with its fluent sympathy alike for the pathological oddity and for the perfect health. It is not the depicting of vice that makes literature immoral; corrupt art is the maladroit art which, presenting less or more of vice, is clumsy enough to leave unneutralised some of the infection, to lay hold of some unwary reader. It is best to leave such art as this to die the natural death of corrupt things. Unfortunately, its denunciation is often undertaken by persons who have lost their humour touch, whose sympathies have become set and cannot be made elastic. Such persons are a social danger, as false prophets who unfortunately have the means of fulfilling their own prophecies. For life is full of things which are innocent if left to themselves, but become noxious by merely having a finger pointed at them; if corrupt art has injured its thousands, discussions of corruption have injured tens of thousands. Humour is an essential for a censor of morals; no one is in a state to discuss literary morality unless he can lay his hand on his heart and vow that he loves Shakespeare's Falstaff. History amply confirms the principle thus laid down. Short-

comings of this kind wrought havoc with the greatest religious revolution in modern history: Puritanism was religion that had lost its sense of humour.

In this way Falstaff is a pathological triumph. His vast bulk is a perpetual symbol of monstrosity: he is a creature of bombast; unhorsed, he 'frets like a gummed velvet,' he —

> sweats to death,
> And lards the lean earth as he walks along;

only a colossus could be the friend to bestride him in the battle; he marches in front of his slim page "like a sow that hath overwhelmed all her litter but one"; pitched into the Thames he has "a kind of alacrity in sinking"; in the wars he prays —

> God keep lead out of me! I need no more weight than mine own bowels.

Huge in body, brilliant in mind, he has a soul that has forgotten to grow up: the elephantine senior bids travellers stand with a —

> What, ye knaves! young men must live.

He must needs be a lad with the other Eastcheap lads, a "latter spring" in the boisterous irresponsible young manhood which is an unconscious prolongation of the nursery life. But nature abhors a monstrosity; great part of the humour of the scenes is made by the real youth repelling the artificial, the natural lads setting on the ugly duckling who has come among them, until even a Doll Tearsheet, as she ogles Falstaff, insinuatingly asks, when he will "leave fighting o' days and foining o' nights, and begin to patch up his old body for heaven." But he is assailed in vain: Falstaff holds the champion's belt for all of the seven deadly sins that do not require exertion. Like the pupils with the fencing master, the comrades of the old knight make their fiercest attacks on him only for the purpose of drawing out his irresistible fence. Pelion upon Ossa of shame is heaped upon

him, but his audacity of unabashedness refuses to be crushed; he is flung into seas of discomfiture, but the elasticity of falsehood brings him up again. All the while we are doing involuntary homage to the strength of moral law in our amused surprise at the colossal invention that can rise superior to it. Art is always the conquest of some material: in the humorous art of these plays moral order has become the stubborn material which is being bent to spectacular effect, as the convicted liar ever gets the better of the convincing truth. And this heroism of moral insensibility is continued to the very end, even to the point where the dream spectacle is to reach the inevitable waking point. The riotous Prince Hal has become the magnificent King Henry; the Falstaff crew have ridden post haste to London, with the aid of a thousand pounds borrowed from Shallow, to enjoy the grand things Falstaff has guaranteed them all from his newly exalted chum. The meeting has come, and the blow has fallen; we turn to hear the first words of a crushed man: and what we hear is one more flash of the old humour —

Falstaff. Master Shallow, I *owe* you a thousand pound.

To all this it may be added that humour includes wit, though the two things are not conterminous. Wit is the finest and brightest form of mental play; the brain has its technique, and Falstaff is the Paganini of humour. It needs but an appropriate theme, and some tour-de-force of inexhaustible invention comes pouring out.

> *Bardolph.* Why, you are so fat, Sir John, that you must needs be out of all compass, out of all reasonable compass, Sir John.
>
> *Falstaff.* Do thou amend thy face, and I'll amend my life; thou art our admiral, thou bearest the lantern in the poop, but 'tis in the nose of thee; thou art the Knight of the Burning Lamp.
>
> *Bardolph.* Why, Sir John, my face does you no harm.
>
> *Falstaff.* No, I'll be sworn; I make as good a use of it as many a man doth of a Death's-head or a memento mori; I

never see thy face but I think upon hell-fire, and Dives that lived in purple; for there he is in his robes, burning, burning. If thou wert any way given to virtue, I would swear by thy face; my oath should be, 'By this fire, that's God's angel': but thou art altogether given over; and wert indeed, but for the light in thy face, the son of utter darkness. When thou rannest up Gadshill in the night to catch my horse, if I did not think thou hadst been an ignis fatuus or a ball of wildfire, there's no purchase in money. O, thou art a perpetual triumph, an everlasting bonfire-light. Thou hast saved me a thousand marks in links and torches, walking with thee in the night betwixt tavern and tavern; but the sack that thou hast drunk me would have bought me lights as good cheap at the dearest chandler's in Europe. I have maintained that salamander of yours with fire any time this two and thirty years; God reward me for it!

Bardolph. 'Sblood, I would my face were in your belly!

Falstaff. God-a-mercy! so should I be sure to be heart-burned.

The prince meets Falstaff on equal terms, and their duets are masterpieces of mental fencing. But, as Falstaff himself says, he is not only witty, but "the cause that wit is in other men"; right through the Falstaff plays there runs an electric storm of brilliance. Even the malapropism of the hostess catches it, and the stage rant of Pistol; we are taught elsewhere that murder may be considered as a fine art, but when Pistol is matched against Doll Tearsheet we have to recognise that there is a fine art of scurrility. At times the wit becomes the regular fooling of the Shakespearean jester. The prince and Falstaff have a clown duet:

Prince. This sanguine coward, this bed-presser, this horse-back-breaker, this huge hill of flesh, —

Falstaff. 'Sblood, you starveling, you elf-skin, you dried neat's tongue, you stockfish! O for breath to utter what is like thee! you tailor's-yard, you sheath, you bow-case, you vile standing-tuck, —

Touchstone himself could not have bettered the prince's mystification of the drawer:[1]

> *Prince.* But, Francis!
>
> *Francis.* My lord?
>
> *Prince.* Wilt thou rob this leathern jerkin, crystal-button, not-pated, agate-ring, puke-stocking, caddis-garter, smooth-tongue, Spanish-pouch, —
>
> *Francis.* O Lord, sir, who do you mean?
>
> *Prince.* Why, then, your brown bastard is your only drink; for, look you, Francis, your white canvas doublet will sully: in Barbary, sir, it cannot come to so much.
>
> *Francis.* What, sir?
>
> *Poins.* [*Within*] Francis!
>
> *Prince.* Away, you rogue! dost thou not hear them call?
>
> [*Here they both call him; the drawer stands amazed, not knowing which way to go.*

But with the Shakespearean inspiration even foolery is a vent for mental wealth; nonsense is simply sense boiling over.

But enough has been written on this topic — I fear, too much; it savours of an offence against humour to seek for it a place in moral economics. I hasten to conclude this chapter, not without suspicion that I shall seem to have been training artillery upon an ignis fatuus, and demonstrating my own lack of humour by undertaking to discuss it.

[1] *First Part of Henry the Fourth:* II. iv, from 40.

BOOK III

THE FORCES OF LIFE IN SHAKESPEARE'S MORAL WORLD

CHAPTER XI: Personality and its Dramatic Expression in Intrigue and Irony

CHAPTER XII: The Momentum of Character and the Sway of Circumstance

CHAPTER XIII: The Pendulum of History

CHAPTER XIV: Supernatural Agency in Shakespeare's Moral World

CHAPTER XV: Moral Accident and Overruling Providence

XI

PERSONALITY AND ITS DRAMATIC EXPRESSION IN INTRIGUE AND IRONY

We pass, in this Third Book, from the phenomena of life to the forces which underlie it; so far at least as such forces of life are reflected in dramatic forms. The most obvious of all the forces entering into human life is that which we call Will: personal, individual will. Of course, to recognise will as a force is not to say that such will is necessarily effective or free. Muscular power is a force: but I may have exerted all the muscular power in my body in an attempt to move toward the north, all the while that stronger muscles than my own were carrying me to the south; my muscular power was not free, and was the reverse of effective, yet it was none the less a force. Similarly, the power of individual will may be restrained in its operation by forces from outside; or even the will may unconsciously have been restrained by other forces within the individual, so that his consciousness of free will may prove to have been a self-deception. The present chapter is occupied with the force of will; restraints of will from within or from without are reserved for the chapters that follow.

Our immediate question then becomes this: Is there any element of dramatic effect which is specially associated with the force of personal will? An answer will readily suggest itself. Scarcely any form of dramatic interest is more prominent than that called Intrigue. Now Intrigue is an expression of personal will in a very pronounced form: the term implies conscious purpose, sustained plan, some amount of effort in the application of

means to ends; often secrecy and finesse are associated with Intrigue, but these are not essential. In *The Merchant of Venice* both Lorenzo and Bassanio are seen wooing. Lorenzo's wooing of Jessica is, dramatically, an intrigue: effort and contrivance are necessary to carry off the Jewess without her father's consent. But Bassanio's wooing does not make an intrigue, for, upon the face of things, the issue does not depend upon Bassanio's will or effort, but upon fate or chance; the dramatic interest of the Caskets Story must be referred to some other head — it is a problem and its solution.

We may go farther. As soon as individual will translates itself into action, it is sure to come into conflict with other individual wills. This leads us to another among the prominent forms of dramatic interest — Irony. Etymologically, this is a Greek word for *saying*, more particularly, *saying* as distinct from *meaning:* hence its suggestion is a doubleness of significance, at first in words, subsequently in situations or events. The word had great vogue in Greek tragedy, which dramatised stories perfectly familiar to the audience as the sacred myths of their gods; hence the spectator in the Greek theatre knew all through the movement what the end of the story must be, and from time to time words spoken in the scenes would have an 'irony,' from the spectator's knowledge of the sequel clashing with the unconsciousness of this sequel on the part of the personages in the story. Thus Œdipus is heard vowing to move heaven and earth for the discovery of the man indicated by the oracle as having polluted the city, and the audience feel a thrill of irony, for they know the polluter will be discovered to be Œdipus himself, though at that point of the story he knows it not. Coming down from Greek to modern drama, the term 'irony' enlarges to include in a general sense the shocks and clashes between one aspect and another of some double situation, the whole grasped by the spectator, only part known to some at least of the personages in the scene. Thus irony is closely associated with dramatic intrigue; it obtains where intrigue clashes with intrigue, or the course of an intrigue

clashes with some external circumstance, or something in the character of the persons concerned. In the play of *Measure for Measure* we have the intrigue of Angelo to use secretly his power over her brother's life as a means of forcing Isabella to his will; we have again the secret intrigue of the disguised Duke to substitute Mariana for Isabella; yet again we are aware of the circumstance that Mariana had been the betrothed bride of Angelo disgracefully cast off: these three things clash together in the spectator's mind as the dramatic interest of irony, when he sees a man unconsciously redeem a former sin in the very act (as he supposes) of committing a new crime. Again, there is another secret intrigue of Angelo to hurry the execution of Claudio when (as he supposes) he has gained the prize for which he promised pardon; this is met by a counter intrigue of the Duke to substitute for Claudio another victim.[1] The irony latent in this clash of intrigues comes to the surface in the final scene, when the exposed Angelo, after having been saved from his first danger, and appearing as the husband of Mariana, is sentenced to death for the foul treachery to Claudio;[2] Mariana, up to this point in league with the Duke, is now plunged in tragic dismay, and with Isabella pleads passionately for the life of the husband that moment granted her: all the while that the Duke is prolonging this strained situation the spectator of the drama has the clue in his possession that will make all straight. In the same play there is a dramatic intrigue in the Duke's hovering, disguised as a Friar, about the scenes from which he is supposed to be at a distance; this intrigue comes in contact with the personality of Lucio,[3] and the spectator catches a shock of irony as Lucio confides to the Friar his low opinion of the Duke; the spectator catches another shock of irony as the disguised Duke leads on Lucio to confess to him misdemeanours of his own which will be used presently when the Duke resumes his seat of judgment. It is obvious enough that intrigue and irony naturally go together in

[1] *Measure for Measure* IV. ii, from 95. [2] V. i, from 405.
[3] III. ii, from 45; V. i.

the moral system of a dramatic literature: as intrigue is specially consecrated to the dramatic expression of individual will, so irony has the function of conveying the clash of individual wills with one another or with circumstances.

In connection with this part of our subject no play of Shakespeare is more brilliant than *The Taming of the Shrew*.[1] It has a primary and a secondary plot: the first is occupied with the wooing of Katherine, the shrew; the second with the wooing of her sister Bianca, a natural and winsome girl. Three suitors are seeking the hand of this Bianca; their suits are made intrigues by the circumstance that her widower father, burdened with the task of finding husbands for his two children, has hit upon the ingenious plan of announcing to his world that he will receive no overture for Bianca until her shrewish elder sister is married; this forces Bianca's lovers to use secrecy and contrivance. It might seem as if this secondary plot, with a triple intrigue and all its possibilities of irony, would overbalance the primary plot. But what this last lacks in quantity it makes up for in quality; the wooing of Katherine is saturated through and through, not exactly with irony, but with a dramatic quality akin to irony — the interest of paradox.

We naturally woo that which is attractive; Petruchio paradoxically undertakes to win what is repellent.

Gremio. But will you woo this wild-cat?
Petruchio. Will I live? . . .
Why came I hither but to that intent?
Think you a little din can daunt mine ears?
Have I not in my time heard lions roar?
Have I not heard the sea puff'd up with winds
Rage like an angry boar chafed with sweat?
Have I not heard great ordnance in the field,
And heaven's artillery thunder in the skies?
Have I not in a pitched battle heard
Loud 'larums, neighing steeds, and trumpets' clang?

[1] Compare the scheme of the play in the Appendix below, page 344.

> And do you tell me of a woman's tongue,
> That gives not half so great a blow to hear
> As will a chestnut in a farmer's fire ?

The method of the wooing is even more paradoxical than the purpose to woo. Petruchio may be described as a social 'hustler': he has all the hustler's accentuated egoism, and understands the force of mere social momentum. He sets himself to reverse everything expected of the conventional wooer; in the bewilderment that ensues he will sweep resistance off its feet by the resolute pace of his movements. While Katherine's shrewishness is the common talk of the city, Petruchio announces himself to the father as a suitor attracted by —

> Her affability and bashful modesty,
> Her wondrous qualities, and mild behaviour.

The delighted Baptista must nevertheless adjourn the interview, as other guests are present, but the hustler cannot wait.

> Signior Baptista, my business asketh haste,
> And every day I cannot come to woo.

Katherine is sent for; in a parenthesis of soliloquy Petruchio unfolds his system of paradox.

> Say that she rail; why then I'll tell her plain
> She sings as sweetly as a nightingale :
> Say that she frown; I'll say she looks as clear
> As morning roses newly wash'd with dew;
> Say she be mute and will not speak a word;
> Then I'll commend her volubility,
> And say she uttereth piercing eloquence:
> If she do bid me pack, I'll give her thanks,
> As though she bid me stay by her a week;
> If she deny to wed, I'll crave the day
> When I shall ask the banns, and when be married.

A stormy scene ensues, but Petruchio will see nothing stormy.

> I find you passing gentle,
> 'Twas told me you were rough and coy and sullen,
> And now I find report a very liar;
> For thou art pleasant, gamesome, passing courteous,
> But slow in speech, yet sweet as spring-time flowers.

The shrew lets off her rage against this wooer to the assembling company, but Petruchio is unmoved.

> *Petru.* If she be curst, it is for policy,
> For she's not froward, but modest as the dove . . .
> And to conclude, we have 'greed so well together,
> That upon Sunday is the wedding-day.
> *Kath.* I'll see thee hang'd on Sunday first.
> *Gremio.* Hark, Petruchio; she says she'll see thee hang'd first.
> *Tranio.* Is this your speeding? nay, then, good night our part!
> *Petru.* Be patient, gentlemen; I choose her for myself:
> If she and I be pleased, what's that to you?
> 'Tis bargain'd 'twixt us twain, being alone,
> That she shall still be curst in company.

Whirled at this pace to a wedding-day, the shrew, with no distinct plan of resistance, can only find a fresh grievance in her proposed bridegroom keeping her waiting: after a while this is lost in a tour-de-force of paradox.

> Petruchio is coming in a new hat and an old jerkin, a pair of old breeches thrice turned, a pair of boots that have been candle-cases, one buckled, another laced, an old rusty sword ta'en out of the town-armoury, with a broken hilt, and chapeless; with two broken points; his horse hipped with an old mothy saddle and stirrups of no kindred; besides, possessed with the glanders and like to mose in the chine; troubled with the lampass, infected with the fashions, full of windgalls, sped with spavins, rayed with the yellows, past cure of the fives, stark spoiled with the staggers, begnawn with the bots, swayed in the back and shoulder-shotten; near-legged before and with a half-checked bit and a head-stall of sheep's leather

> which, being restrained to keep him from stumbling, hath been often burst and now repaired with knots; one girth six times pieced and a woman's crupper of velure, which hath two letters for her name fairly set down in studs, and here and there pieced with pack-thread.

Even the anxious father has to remonstrate, but Petruchio will not explain.

> To me she's married, not unto my clothes.

How the momentum of Petruchio's wildness gets the parties into the church we can only conjecture, for that part of the story goes on behind the scenes; but the proceedings in the church are related by Gremio: how the mad bridegroom swears his 'ay' so loud that the priest drops the book, and is cuffed as he picks it up again; how he ends by drinking a health, and throws the sops in the sexton's face. Katherine at last wakes up her resistance when the newly wedded man will go away on unexplained business before the wedding feast; Petruchio sweeps away the resisting bride as in a fervour of delivering gallantry.

> Grumio,
> Draw forth thy weapon, we are beset with thieves;
> Rescue thy mistress, if thou be a man.
> Fear not, sweet wench, they shall not touch thee, Kate;
> I'll buckler thee against a million.

The paradoxical taming is continued at home.

> *Katherine.* I, who never knew how to entreat,
> Nor never needed that I should entreat,
> Am starved for meat, giddy for lack of sleep;
> With oaths kept waking, and with brawling fed;
> And that which spites me more than all these wants,
> He does it under name of perfect love;
> As who should say, if I should sleep or eat,
> 'Twere deadly sickness or else present death.[1]

[1] *Taming of Shrew* IV. iii. 8.

The paradoxical conclusion of this primary plot is that the tamed shrew reads to the mild Bianca and other normal wives a long lecture on wifely submissiveness.

What the interest of paradox is to the primary, the interest of irony is to the secondary plot. As we have seen, three lovers make conflicting suits for the hand of the pretty Bianca: Hortensio is a neighbour: Gremio has the common combination of age with wealth; Lucentio is a newcomer to Padua, and with him it is a case of love at first sight.[1] All three lovers have to make their approach indirectly. Hortensio, in return for introducing his friend Petruchio as a suitor for Katherine, arranges that his friend shall introduce himself disguised as a teacher of music for Bianca. Gremio on his part will have an agent for his interests among Bianca's teachers. But Lucentio, in scholar's disguise, applies for this agency: already we get our first flash of irony as Gremio unconsciously introduces into the circle of Bianca's instructors his dangerous rival. As the story progresses, a situation of prolonged irony appears: the disguised rivals have to carry on their wooing in the presence of one another.[2] The fair pupil has some trouble to keep the peace between her masters; she sets the musician to getting his difficult instrument in order, while the teacher of poetry has his chance.

Lucentio. 'Hic ibat Simois; hic est Sigeia tellus;
Hic steterat Priami regia celsa senis.'

'Hic ibat,' as I told you before, — 'Simois,' I am Lucentio, — 'hic est,' son unto Vincentio of Pisa, — 'Sigeia tellus,' disguised thus to get your love; — 'Hic steterat,' and that Lucentio that comes a-wooing, — 'Priami,' is my man Tranio, — 'regia,' bearing my port, — 'celsa senis,' that we might beguile the old pantaloon.

Bianca tries if she has learned her lesson.

[1] *Taming of Shrew* I. i. 152, and whole scene. [2] III. i.

'Hic ibat Simois,' I know you not, — 'hic est Sigeia tellus,' I trust you not, — 'Hic steterat Priami,' take heed he hear us not, — 'regia,' presume not, — 'celsa senis' despair not.

The music-teacher in his turn begs Bianca to read a new gamut, newer than anything taught in his trade before — the gamut of Hortensio.

Bianca (*reads*) "'Gamut' I am, the ground of all accord,
'A re,' to plead Hortensio's passion;
'B mi,' Bianca, take him for thy lord,
'C fa ut,' that loves with all affection:
'D sol re,' one clef, two notes have I:
'E la mi,' show pity, or I die."
Call you this gamut? tut, I like it not:
Old fashions please me best; I am not so nice,
To change true rules for old inventions.

But the finesse of intrigue in the secondary plot goes far beyond this. Lucentio has come to Padua with a certain amount of state; he has servants, and a family name to support. One of his servants is Tranio, in whom we recognise a modernisation of a type familiar to Roman Comedy, the scheming slave or professional sharper. When, therefore, Lucentio assumes his disguise, he makes this Tranio take his master's name and position; more than this, the pseudo-Lucentio is to go in state to Baptista's house, and be in name one more suitor for the hand of Bianca; he will thus be always at hand to second his master's secret play.[1] Tranio acts the gentleman to perfection, and makes a social impression for the name of 'Lucentio.'[2] Thus the real Lucentio carries on a double campaign, wooing the lady in his own (disguised) person, and through his servant heading off his rivals. Two more strokes of irony are due to the machinations of Tranio, soi-disant Lucentio. When one of the rivals, Hortensio, is getting discouraged — since the teacher of poetry steadily gains upon the teacher of music — the supposed

[1] I. i, from 203. [2] II. i, from 87; I. ii, from 219.

Lucentio with easy magnanimity moves Hortensio to mutual renunciation of their claims.[1]

Hortensio. Quick proceeders, marry! Now, tell me, I pray,
You that durst swear that your mistress Bianca
Loved none in the world so well as Lucentio.
Tranio. O despiteful love! unconstant womankind!
I tell thee, Licio, this is wonderful.
Hortensio. Mistake no more: I am not Licio,
Nor a musician, as I seem to be;
But one that scorn to live in this disguise. . . .
Know, sir, that I am call'd Hortensio.
Tranio. Signior Hortensio, I have often heard
Of your entire affection to Bianca;
And since mine eyes are witness of her lightness,
I will with you, if you be so contented,
Forswear Bianca and her love for ever.
Hortensio. See, how they kiss and court! Signior Lucentio,
Here is my hand, and here I firmly vow
Never to woo her more, but do forswear her,
As one unworthy all the former favours
That I have fondly flatter'd her withal.
Tranio. And here I take the like unfeigned oath,
Never to marry with her though she would entreat.

Not less ironical is the situation when the assumed Lucentio makes his play against the other rival.[2] Gremio has no attractions of youth; his time comes when the question is of settlements. But even Gremio's wealth is made to look small by one who can draw upon the bank of imagination.

Baptista. Say, Signior Gremio, what can you assure her?
Gremio. First, as you know, my house within the city
Is richly furnished with plate and gold;
Basins and ewers to lave her dainty hands;
My hangings all of Tyrian tapestry;
In ivory coffers I have stuff'd my crowns;

[1] IV. ii. [2] II. i, from 343.

In cypress chests my arras counterpoints,
Costly apparel, tents, and canopies,
Fine linen, Turkey cushions boss'd with pearl,
Valance of Venice gold in needlework,
Pewter and brass and all things that belong
To house or housekeeping: then, at my farm
I have a hundred milch-kine to the pail,
Sixscore fat oxen standing in my stalls,
And all things answerable to this portion.
Myself am struck in years, I must confess;
And if I die to-morrow, this is hers,
If whilst I live she will be only mine.

Tranio. That 'only' came well in. Sir, list to me:
I am my father's heir and only son:
If I may have your daughter to my wife,
I'll leave her houses three or four as good,
Within rich Pisa walls, as any one
Old Signior Gremio has in Padua;
Besides two thousand ducats by the year
Of fruitful land, all which shall be her jointure.
What, have I pinch'd you, Signior Gremio?

Gremio. Two thousand ducats by the year of land!
My land amounts not to so much in all;
That she shall have; besides an argosy
That now is lying in Marseilles' road.
What, have I choked you with an argosy?

Tranio. Gremio, 'tis known my father hath no less
Than three great argosies; besides two galliases,
And twelve tight galleys: these I will assure her,
And twice as much, whate'er thou offer'st next.

Gremio. Nay, I have offer'd all, I have no more;
And she can have no more than all I have.

Four fine situations of irony have thus sprung from the clash of intrigues in the secondary plot. A fifth is added as at last the secondary plot is made to clash with the primary. Tranio, playing the rôle of his master, has had it all his own way so far; but he is now, naturally enough, called upon to make good his

promises by a pledge from Lucentio's father.[1] Without a blush he undertakes this.

> 'Tis in my head to do my master good;
> I see no reason, but supposed Lucentio
> Must get a father, call'd 'supposed Vincentio';
> And that's a wonder: fathers commonly
> Do get their children; but in this case of wooing,
> A child shall get a sire, if I fail not of my cunning.

The plan is a simple one: the strangers entering the city are scanned, until a suitable figure is found in a certain Pedant.[2]

> *Tranio.* What countryman, I pray?
> *Pedant.* Of Mantua.
> *Tranio.* Of Mantua, sir? marry, God forbid!
> And come to Padua, careless of your life?
> *Pedant.* My life, sir! how, I pray? for that goes hard.
> *Tranio.* 'Tis death for any one in Mantua
> To come to Padua. Know you not the cause?
> Your ships are stay'd at Venice, and the duke,
> For private quarrel 'twixt your duke and him,
> Hath publish'd and proclaim'd it openly:
> 'Tis marvel, but that you are but newly come,
> You might have heard it else proclaim'd about.
> *Pedant.* Alas, sir, it is worse for me than so!
> For I have bills for money by exchange
> From Florence and must here deliver them.

Tranio obligingly proposes that the stranger shall assume the personality of one Sir Vincentio of Pisa, shortly expected to arrange a matter of dowry for his son on his marriage to Signior Baptista's daughter; the Pedant is only too glad to save his life on these easy terms. So far the intrigue of Tranio is triumphant; but meanwhile the train of events which makes the primary plot of the play is preparing for it a collision. Petruchio and his Katherine journeying to Padua fall in by the

[1] II. i, from 389. [2] IV. ii, from 59.

way with a reverend senior travelling in the same direction;[1] when the name of Vincentio of Pisa is mentioned, Petruchio hails him as a prospective marriage connection, and escorts him to the house where his son will be found to have made a wealthy and influential match. As they knock at the door[2] the real and the assumed Vincentio clash.

> *Pedant* (*looking out at the window*). What's he that knocks as he would beat down the gate?
>
> *Vincentio*. Is Signior Lucentio within, sir?
>
> *Pedant*. He's within, sir, but not to be spoken withal.
>
> *Vincentio*. What if a man bring him a hundred pound or two, to make merry withal.
>
> *Pedant*. Keep your hundred pounds to yourself: he shall need none, so long as I live.
>
> *Petruchio*. Nay, I told you your son was well beloved in Padua. Do you hear, sir? To leave frivolous circumstances, I pray you, tell Signior Lucentio, that his father is come from Pisa, and is here at the door to speak with him.
>
> *Pedant*. Thou liest: his father is come from Padua, and here looking out at the window.
>
> *Vincentio*. Art thou his father?
>
> *Pedant*. Ay, sir; so his mother says, if I may believe her.
>
> *Petruchio* (*to Vincentio*). Why, how now, gentleman! why, this is flat knavery, to take upon you another man's name.
>
> *Pedant*. Lay hands on the villain: I believe a' means to cozen somebody in this city under my countenance.

The ironical situation is prolonged as Lucentio's servants come on the scene, and hasten to take part against their master's own father; stormy passages ensue, until Lucentio comes in person, but comes with his bride on his arm fresh from the church. There is explanation and confession: but the essential of the marriage has been secured, and the irate father can only make the best of the circumstances: irony gives place to the usual happy ending.

For Shakespeare's treatment of intrigue and irony it seems

[1] IV. v, from 26. [2] V. i.

natural to mention first this play of *The Taming of the Shrew;* no other drama is richer in ironic situations, while the personal will, of which intrigue is the embodiment, seems to find its climax in a sustained paradox. Hardly less remarkable is *The Two Gentlemen of Verona:* here the successive advances in intrigue and irony seem to be made with all the regularity of a game of chess.[1]

The opening situation is complex, yet without conflict. We have three independent interests to keep before our minds: there is the romantic friendship between Proteus and Valentine, the two gentlemen of Verona; there is the love of one of them, Proteus, for Julia; again, over in Milan, there is what, to distinguish it from love, we may call a piece of social matchmaking — the suit of Sir Thurio for the hand of Silvia, the Duke's daughter, favoured by her father, resisted by herself. The movement of the play commences with Valentine setting off on his travels; he comes to Milan, and entertains for Silvia a passion which is fully reciprocated. This love of Valentine and Silvia becomes an intrigue, since it must be kept from the knowledge of the father and the accepted suitor. The irony latent in such a situation becomes apparent in a later scene,[2] at a time when Valentine's secret has been betrayed to the Duke. The lover, conscious to himself of a rope-ladder under his cloak with which he is to scale Silvia's window, is detained by the Duke with a long confidential explanation of his purpose — from disgust with his daughter's perverseness — to marry again.

Val. What would your Grace have me to do in this?
Duke. There is a lady in Verona here
Whom I affect; but she is nice and coy
And nought esteems my aged eloquence:
Now therefore would I have thee to my tutor —
For long agone I have forgot to court;

[1] Compare the scheme of the play in the Appendix below, page 341.
[2] *Two Gentlemen of Verona* III. i, from 51.

Besides, the fashion of the time is changed —
How and which way I may bestow myself
To be regarded in her sun-bright eye.

Valentine gives the Duke good advice; but it appears that the lady is jealously kept all day from the approach of wooers.

Val. Why, then, I would resort to her by night.
Duke. Ay, but the doors be lock'd and keys kept safe,
That no man hath recourse to her by night.
Val. What lets but one may enter at her window?
Duke. Her chamber is aloft, far from the ground,
And built so shelving that one cannot climb it
Without apparent hazard of his life.
Val. Why then, a ladder quaintly made of cords,
To cast up, with a pair of anchoring hooks,
Would serve to scale another Hero's tower,
So bold Leander would adventure it.
Duke. Now, as thou art a gentleman of blood,
Advise me where I may have such a ladder.
Val. When would you use it? pray, sir, tell me that.
Duke. This very night; for Love is like a child,
That longs for every thing that he can come by.
Val. By seven o'clock I'll get you such a ladder.
Duke. But, hark thee; I will go to her alone:
How shall I best convey the ladder thither?
Val. It will be light, my lord, that you may bear it
Under a cloak that is of any length.
Duke. A cloak as long as thine will serve the turn?
Val. Ay, my good lord.
Duke. Then let me see thy cloak:
I'll get me one of such another length.
Val. Why, any cloak will serve the turn, my lord.
Duke. How shall I fashion me to wear a cloak?
I pray thee, let me feel thy cloak upon me.
What letter is this same? What's here? 'To Silvia'!
And here an engine fit for my proceeding.

Meanwhile the action of the play has made a second advance when Proteus, unexpectedly, has also been sent by his father to

travel. Proteus has arrived at Milan, and instantly fallen in love with Silvia. Such love makes a triple intrigue: it is an intrigue in love, for Proteus is thus false to his Julia; it is an intrigue in friendship, Proteus betraying his friend's secret to the Duke in order to get Valentine out of the way; yet again, it is an intrigue in social life and matchmaking, since the only way of getting access to Silvia is for Proteus to pretend to woo on behalf of Sir Thurio.

Proteus. Already have I been false to Valentine,
And now I must be as unjust to Thurio.
Under the colour of commending him,
I have access my own love to prefer:
But Silvia is too fair, too true, too holy,
To be corrupted with my worthless gifts.
When I protest true loyalty to her,
She twits me with my falsehood to my friend;
When to her beauty I commend my vows,
She bids me think how I have been forsworn
In breaking faith with Julia whom I loved.[1]

The movement advances yet another stage: Julia, fearing herself forsaken by her absent lover, sets off to travel in disguise of a boy; and at last, in Milan, engages herself as page to the unconscious Proteus. What before was triple intrigue now becomes triple irony. There is irony in love, as Julia is brought by a friendly landlord to hear her lover serenade another mistress.[2]

Host. How now! are you sadder than you were before? How do you, man? the music likes you not.

Julia. You mistake: the musician likes me not.

Host. Why, my pretty youth?

Julia. He plays false, father.

Host. How? out of tune on the strings?

Julia. Not so; but yet so false that he grieves my very heart-strings.

Host. You have a quick ear.

[1] IV. ii. 1. [2] IV. ii, from 26.

Julia. Ay, I would I were deaf; it makes me have a slow heart.

Host. I perceive you delight not in music.

Julia. Not a whit, when it jars so.

Host. Hark, what fine change is in the music!

Julia. Ay, that change is the spite.

Host. You would have them always play but one thing?

Julia. I would always have one play but one thing.

But there is also irony in friendship: by one of Shakespeare's happiest touches, Proteus sends the page to Silvia for her picture; as the indignant Silvia takes the part of the unknown Julia the real Julia is warming to her, and thus a secretly dawning affection between their mistresses comes to supply the place of the secretly ruptured friendship between the two gentlemen of Verona.[1]

Silvia. O, he sends you for a picture.

Julia. Ay, madam.

Silvia. Ursula, bring my picture there.
Go, give your master this: tell him from me,
One Julia, that his changing thoughts forget,
Would better fit his chamber than this shadow . . .

Julia. Madam, he sends your ladyship this ring.

Silvia. The more shame for him that he sends it me;
For I have heard him say a thousand times
His Julia gave it him at his departure.
Though his false finger have profaned the ring,
Mine shall not do his Julia so much wrong.

Julia. She thanks you.

Silvia. What say'st thou?

Julia. I thank you, madam, that you tender her.
Poor gentlewoman! my master wrongs her much.

Silvia. Dost thou know her?

Julia. Almost as well as I do know myself:
To think upon her woes I do protest
That I have wept a hundred several times.

Silvia. Belike she thinks that Proteus hath forsook her.

[1] IV. iv, from 113.

Julia. I think she doth; and that's her cause of sorrow.
Silvia. Is she not passing fair?
Julia. She hath been fairer, madam, than she is:
When she did think my master loved her well,
She, in my judgement, was as fair as you;
But since she did neglect her looking-glass,
And threw her sun-expelling mask away,
The air hath starved the roses in her cheeks,
And pinch'd the lily-tincture of her face,
That now she is become as black as I.
Silvia. How tall was she?
Julia. About my stature: for, at Pentecost,
When all our pageants of delight were play'd,
Our youth got me to play the woman's part,
And I was trimm'd in Madam Julia's gown;
Which served me as fit, by all men's judgements,
As if the garment had been made for me:
Therefore I know she is about my height.
And at that time I made her weep agood,
For I did play a lamentable part:
Madam, 'twas Ariadne passioning
For Theseus' perjury and unjust flight;
Which I so lively acted with my tears
That my poor mistress, moved therewithal,
Wept bitterly; and would I might be dead
If I in thought felt not her very sorrow!
Silvia. She is beholding to thee, gentle youth.
Alas, poor lady, desolate and left!
I weep myself to think upon thy words.
Here, youth, there is my purse: I give thee this
For thy sweet mistress' sake, because thou lovest her.
Farewell. [*Exit.*
Julia. And she shall thank you for't, if e'er you know her.

To such irony in love and friendship is added, for completeness, irony in the matter of the matchmaker's intrigue, when Proteus reports progress to Sir Thurio, for whom he is supposed to be wooing, and the asides of the page accentuate the ironic situation.[1]

[1] V. ii.

Thurio. Sir Proteus, what says Silvia to my suit?
Proteus. O, sir, I find her milder than she was;
And yet she takes exceptions at your person.
Thurio. What, that my leg is too long?
Proteus. No; that it is too little.
Thurio. I'll wear a boot, to make it somewhat rounder.
Julia. (*Aside*) But love will not be spurr'd to what it loathes.
Thurio. What says she to my face?
Proteus. She says it is a fair one.
Thurio. Nay then, the wanton lies; my face is black.
Proteus. But pearls are fair; and the old saying is,
Black men are pearls in beauteous ladies' eyes.
Julia. (*Aside*) 'Tis true; such pearls as put out ladies' eyes;
For I had rather wink than look on them.
Thurio. How likes she my discourse?
Proteus. Ill, when you talk of war.
Thurio. But well, when I discourse of love and peace?
Julia. (*Aside*) But better, indeed, when you hold your peace.
Thurio. What says she to my valour?
Proteus. O, sir, she makes no doubt of that.
Julia. (*Aside*) She needs not, when she knows it cowardice.
Thurio. What says she to my birth?
Proteus. That you are well derived.
Julia. (*Aside*) True; from a gentleman to a fool.

Already we have a triple intrigue with its triple irony; it only needs that a further advance of the movement shall bring the threads of the plot to a common meeting point. This is secured by the agency of a band of Outlaws infesting Italian roads;[1] first Valentine, going into banishment, is captured by them and becomes their captain; then all the other personages of the plot in succession fall into the hands of the Outlaws and the power of Valentine. The prolonged irony of the plot thus intensifies to such shocks of clashing as will rapidly produce new combinations. First, we have Proteus forcing his love upon the indignant Silvia in the hearing of Valentine himself: the injured

[1] IV. i; compare V. iii, iv.

friend discovers himself, and Proteus's guilty intrigue is shattered at a blow. But in the rebound from this we have another shock: in his fulness of forgiveness Valentine speaks of bestowing his Silvia on Proteus, when a cry from the swooning page discovers Julia. The captured Duke and Thurio cease to present further obstacles. All dissolves into a final situation of equilibrium, triple like the opening situation, but with a happy change of persons: we end with the restored friendship of Valentine and Proteus, the restored love of Proteus and Julia, and the new love of Valentine and Silvia triumphant over all the crosses of fortune.

The two plays of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Twelfth Night* have been mentioned in a previous chapter as examples of plot resting mainly upon the clash of intrigues. Such plays naturally will be full of irony. Two illustrations are especially striking. The jealous Ford, warned of Falstaff's designs against his wife, forms a deep intrigue of his own: in disguise he seeks the knight, and makes a pretext for urging him on in his wicked purpose; Ford's idea, of course, being to keep in touch with Falstaff's intrigue until he can choose his own moment for exposing it. But to the dramatic spectator the irony is exquisite: a gallant forming a design against a wife is being paid money by the husband for acting upon it; again, Ford, laying a deep scheme for finding out whether his wife may not be in some slight degree assailable, is forced under his disguise to listen patiently to a circumstantial account of how this wife has been already assailed, and further to know that he himself was present on the occasion and blindly let the assailant escape. From *Twelfth Night* comes the prettiest of all ironic situations. The disguised Viola loves the Duke, and naturally would throw obstacles in the way of the love embassies to Olivia. So the supposed page reads lectures to his master on love.

Viola. Say that some lady, as perhaps there is,
Hath for your love as great a pang of heart

As you have for Olivia: you cannot love her;
You tell her so; must she not then be answer'd?

The Duke with much rhetoric protests that no woman's heart is big enough to hold love like his own.

Viola. Ay, but I know,—
Duke. What dost thou know?
Viola. Too well what love women to men may owe:
In faith, they are as true of heart as we.
My father had a daughter loved a man,
As it might be, perhaps, were I a woman,
I should your lordship.
Duke. And what's her history?
Viola. A blank, my lord. She never told her love,
But let concealment, like a worm i' the bud,
Feed on her damask cheek: she pined in thought;
And with a green and yellow melancholy
She sat like patience on a monument,
Smiling at grief. Was not this love indeed? . . .
Duke. But died thy sister of her love, my boy?
Viola. I am all the daughters of my father's house,
And all the brothers, too: and yet, I know not.

A Midsummer-Night's Dream[1] goes beyond even *Twelfth Night* in intricacy of ironic situations. It well may; for in the *Midsummer-Night's Dream* supernatural machinery is available, and fairy enchantment goes to swell the natural crossing of circumstance. We hear how Cupid's fiery shaft, aimed in vain at a maiden queen, fell upon a little western flower which is called love-in-idleness:[2]

The juice of it on sleeping eye-lids laid
Will make or man or woman madly dote
Upon the next live creature that it sees.

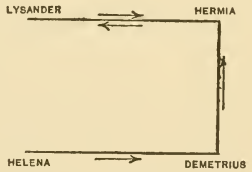
[1] Compare the scheme of the play in the Appendix below, page 342.
[2] *Midsummer-Night's Dream* II. i. 155–187.

But for this sweet poison there is an antidote: Dian's bud prevails over Cupid's flower, if it be crushed into the eye of the deluded lover:[1]

> Whose liquor hath this virtuous property,
> To take from thence all error with his might,
> And make his eyeballs roll with wonted sight.

With motive agencies of this kind to draw upon, we are prepared for a plot that will exhibit an ever increasing crescendo of entanglement.

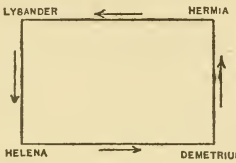
The original situation — lying outside the play — was simple: two pairs of mutual loves, Lysander and Hermia, Demetrius and Helena. When the parties first appear before us in the play,[2] some unknown accident or personal whim has produced a situation of perversity; for Demetrius has transferred his love to Hermia, two men loving the same woman, while Helena is forsaken, yet still loves. This situation is converted into a triple intrigue by the circumstance that Hermia's father favours



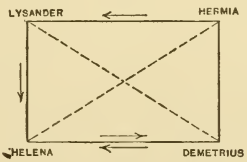
the suit of Demetrius, and invokes the authority of the Duke. Accordingly we have, first, the lovers Lysander and Hermia stealing away by night out of Athens; then Helena, admitted to their confidence, betraying their flight to Demetrius;[3] then again, as Demetrius pursues the lovers, Helena herself pursuing Demetrius.[4] In this entanglement of perverse intrigue all enter the enchanted wood. Now the King of Fairies interferes:

[1] III. ii. 366; IV. i. 78.
[2] I. i, from 21.
[3] I. i. 246.
[4] II. ii, from 84.

hearing the lamentations of Helena and the scorn of Demetrius, he sends Puck to exercise the virtue of Cupid's flower upon 'an Athenian' whom he will find in the wood; Puck mistakes



his man, and anoints the eyes of Lysander, who, when he awakes, is enchanted into adoration of Helena.[1] We have thus — not, as in *Twelfth Night*, a triangular duel of fancy — but what may be called a quadrangular duel of perverse affection: Lysander in love with Helena, Helena with Demetrius, Demetrius with Hermia, Hermia with Lysander. The mistake being discovered, Oberon himself takes charge of the remedy:[2] he applies the juice to Demetrius's eyes, while Puck is sent to bring Helena to the side of Demetrius when he shall awake. The charm takes effect, but the complication is greater than ever: once more we have two men wooing one woman, with



another woman forsaken; but Helena, the doubly-wooed, takes it all for mockery of her forsaken condition; at last she turns upon Hermia, and squabbles between the girls are added to crossings of the lovers.[3]

[1] II. ii. 70, 103. [2] III. ii, from 88.

[3] From III. ii. 192 to 447 this acutest phase of the entanglement prevails: dotted lines in the figure suggest the breaking up of amicable relations between the two girls, and again between the two men.

Helena. Lo, she is one of this confederacy!
Now I perceive they have conjoin'd all three
To fashion this false sport, in spite of me.
Injurious Hermia! most ungrateful maid!
Have you conspired, have you with these contrived
To bait me with this foul derision?
Is all the counsel that we two have shared,
The sisters' vows, the hours that we have spent,
When we have chid the hasty-footed time
For parting us, — O, is it all forgot?
All school-days' friendship, childhood innocence?

This is only the mild beginning: in time they come near to personal violence.

Helena. I pray you, though you mock me, gentlemen,
Let her not hurt me: I was never curst; . . .
O, when she's angry, she is keen and shrewd!
She was a vixen when she went to school;
And though she be but little, she is fierce.
Hermia. 'Little' again! nothing but 'low' and 'little'!
Why will you suffer her to flout me thus?
Let me come to her.

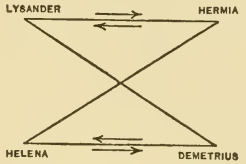
Meanwhile the combative spirit has spread to the men:

Demetrius. If she cannot entreat, I can compel.
Lysander. Thou can'st compel no more than she entreat. . . .
Demetrius. I say I love thee more than he can do.
Lysander. If thou say so, withdraw, and prove it too.

At last we have the vixenish Hermia chasing the longer-legged Helena, the two lovers with drawn swords chasing one another through the dusky wood; Puck, with mist and mimicking voice, rejoicing to emphasise the confusion. When all lie down from sheer weariness, unconscious of the vicinity of the others, the time has come for applying the antidote. It only needs to squeeze Dian's bud into the eyes of Lysander,[1] and the whole

[1] III. ii. 450.

tangle of ironic perversity resolves into the final happy situation: two pairs of loyal lovers, the sundered friendship of the schoolmates and the sundered good-fellowship of the young men entirely restored. As the four awake and leave the



enchanted wood, they can hardly persuade themselves that the distracting events of the night have been anything more than a midsummer-night's dream.[1]

Two more of Shakespeare's comedies are noteworthy for the treatment of intrigue and irony. The main plot of *Much Ado About Nothing*[2] rests upon an intrigue of the blackest villany. Don John, rebel against his brother the Prince, has been conquered, and brought home in sullen subjection: he is on the watch for mischief. He and his followers concert a deep scheme against a favourite of the Prince: it is that some one should personate Hero, and exhibit her in an equivocal situation before the Prince and his friend, the very night before she is to become this Claudio's bride. But conspiracy is for ever at the mercy of accident; irony and accident combine when the dramatic providence of the play contrives the slightest of accidents as sufficient for the purpose. It is found in the Night Watch — stupidest of all Night Watches, a company of louts officered by a pair of asses; these have not had time to compose themselves to sleep through their watch before they happen to overhear a conversation of Don John's men, and the conspiracy is betrayed before it has reached its completion. It is however just

[1] IV. i. 136–196.

[2] Compare the scheme of the play in the Appendix below, page 346.

here that the strongest irony comes in. The officers of the watch, Dogberry and Verges, big with self-importance, bring their discovery to the governor.[1]

Leonato. What would you with me, honest neighbour ?

Dogberry. Marry, sir, I would have some confidence with you that decerns you nearly.

Leonato. Brief, I pray you; for you see it is a busy time with me.

Dogberry. Marry, this it is, sir.

Verges. Yes, in truth it is, sir.

Leonato. What is it, my good friends ?

Dogberry. Goodman Verges, sir, speaks a little off the matter: an old man, sir, and his wits are not so blunt as, God help, I would desire they were; but, in faith, honest as the skin between his brows.

Verges. Yes, I thank God I am as honest as any man living that is an old man and no honester than I.

Dogberry. Comparisons are odorous: palabras, neighbour Verges.

Leonato. Neighbours, you are tedious.

Dogberry. It pleases your worship to say so, but we are the poor duke's officers; but truly, for mine own part, if I were as tedious as a king, I could find it in my heart to bestow it all of your worship.

Leonato. All thy tediousness on me, ah ?

Dogberry. Yea, an 'twere a thousand pound more than 'tis; for I hear as good exclamation on your worship as of any man in the city; and though I be but a poor man, I am glad to hear it.

Verges. And so am I.

Leonato. I would fain know what you have to say.

Verges. Marry, sir, our watch to-night, excepting your worship's presence, ha' ta'en a couple of as arrant knaves as any in Messina.

Dogberry. A good old man, sir; he will be talking: as they say, when the age is in, the wit is out: God help us!

[1] *Much Ado* III. v.

it is a world to see. Well said, i' faith, neighbour Verges: well, God's a good man; an two men ride of a horse, one must ride behind. An honest soul, i' faith, sir; by my troth he is, as ever broke bread; but God is to be worshipped; all men are not alike; alas, good neighbour.

Leonato. Indeed, neighbour, he comes too short of you.

Dogberry. Gifts that God gives.

Leonato. I must leave you.

Dogberry. One word, sir: our watch, sir, have indeed comprehended two aspicious persons, and we would have them this morning examined before your worship.

Leonato. Take their examination yourself and bring it me: I am now in great haste, as it may appear unto you.

The dramatic spectator thus watches the important discovery in the act of being revealed, and revealed to the father of the threatened bride: but he sees, on the other hand, the fussy haste of Leonato, with a bridal ceremony on his hands, and the fussy self-importance of Dogberry and Verges, resolved to make the most of their accidental find, clash together, and delay the understanding of what has happened until it is too late, and the unhappy Hero has been shamed before the whole congregation. The resolution of this entanglement is striking. Villanous intrigue has been met by accident; has been reinstated by perverse folly: it is now met by what may be called the pious intrigue of the Friar. His sagacity has suspected some concealed wrong: he throws over Hero the veil of a reputed death, until bridegroom and Prince and father have learned the truth and been stricken with remorse. Claudio penitentially undertakes the strange recompense to the family honour, that he shall wed a veiled and unknown bride; the raised veil displays Hero risen from the death of her slandered fame, and all ends happily.

As the main plot of this play is interesting for its peculiar handling of intrigue and irony, so the underplot is a masterpiece of what we have already seen in another play — the paradoxical intrigue. Benedict and Beatrice have become types for the

whole literary world of the commonest of social conventionalities, what Shakespeare calls "the merry war of the sexes." The underplot is an ingenious conspiracy of the other personages of the story to bring the man-quizzer and the woman-quizzer into love with one another. The vein of paradox is richly worked, and concludes in a paradoxical consummation.

> *Benedick.* A miracle! here's our own hands against our hearts. Come, I will have thee; but, by this light, I take thee for pity.
>
> *Beatrice.* I would not deny you; but, by this good day, I yield upon great persuasion; and partly to save your life, for I was told you were in a consumption.

The other play to which I have made reference is the comedy of *All's Well that Ends Well.* We are not concerned with the difficult question of the play — the exact characters of Helena and Bertram. It is enough that the plot is made by a pair of cross intrigues.[1] There is the intrigue of Helena to win Bertram; successful so far that the King, grateful for his rescue from illness, has used his feudal authority to force unwilling Bertram to accept Helena as his wife. But though the ceremony of marriage is compulsory, its consummation depends upon Bertram's will: his intrigue is to escape the reality of the union to which he has been obliged to give nominal assent. Bertram sends the obedient wife to his ancestral home, making a pretext for a temporary separation which he means shall be eternal. Helena at last learns her husband's will in this enigmatic message:[2]

> When thou canst get the ring upon my finger which never shall come off, and show me a child begotten of thy body that I am father to, then call me husband: but in such a 'then' I write a 'never.'

[1] Compare the scheme of the play in the Appendix below, p. 345.

[2] *All's Well* III. ii. 59.

This is of course the crux of the whole plot: the opposing intrigues have met in a central point. All that follows is a prolonged irony: Bertram, using deep finesse to point the impossibility of union with Helena, is all the while teaching Helena the exact means of winning him. As happens so often with enforced marriages, Bertram takes refuge in general dissipation; in particular, he wooes a virtuous maiden of Florence. Helena has disappeared, as it seems never to return; and in time is supposed to be dead. But she has followed in secret her husband's career, and at last concerts her plot with Diana of Florence, to take Diana's place, and turn an intended sin into a deed of restitution.

Helena. Why then to-night
Let us assay our plot; which, if it speed,
Is wicked meaning in a lawful deed
And lawful meaning in a lawful act,
Where both not sin, and yet a sinful fact.[1]

The irony that tinctures the whole situation breaks out finely at one point in the dialogue. The impassioned Bertram is wooing the Florentine maiden, when she suddenly seems to yield.[2]

Diana. Give me that ring.
Bertram. I'll lend it thee, my dear; but have no power
To give it from me.
Diana. Will you not, my lord?
Bertram. It is an honour 'longing to our house,
Bequeathed down from many ancestors;
Which were the greatest obloquy i' the world
In me to lose.
Diana. Mine honour's such a ring:
My chastity's the jewel of our house,
Bequeathed down from many ancestors;
Which were the greatest obloquy i' the world
In me to lose: thus your own proper wisdom

[1] III. vii. fin. [2] IV. ii. 39.

Brings in the champion Honour on my part,
Against your vain assault.
Bertram. Here, take my ring:
My house, mine honour, yea, my life, be thine,
And I'll be bid by thee.

The plot goes forward to its completion. Bertram awakes from deepest disgrace to find a refuge in the restored Helena; he has consummated a union in the act of deserting it, and by his own unconscious deed fulfilled the impossible condition his own bitter wit had devised.

In this way intrigue, with its attendant irony, dominates the comedies of Shakespeare. But intrigue has a place in tragedy also, and here the irony may be of a different kind. The great study for this is the play of *Othello*.[1] As motive centre of this play, we have Iago, whose soul is shaped by intrigue; infinitely crafty to plot, Iago is also infinitely subtle to suspect; until suspicion goes beyond all natural bounds, and — like an eye strained by gazing at strong colours — Iago sees nothing but his own dark passions even in the purity of Othello and Cassio.[2] The opening situation of the drama is threefold. In Roderigo we have lust: the mere pursuit of a beauty which morally is on a plane out of his reach; mere animal pursuit, in the spirit of the poet's scornful word —

Man is the hunter; woman is his game;
The sleek and comely creatures of the chase;
We hunt them for the beauty of their skins.

Cassio is heart whole: even in his liaison with Bianca — which in the spirit of the age must be considered an innocent thing — he is tolerant, not amorous; while he has been the trusted go-between in arranging the marriage of Desdemona with his chief. The third element in the opening situation is the mutual love of Othello and Desdemona; the natural affinity of soul which has

[1] Compare the scheme of the play in the Appendix below, p. 363.
[2] *Othello:* II. i. 304, 316.

drawn together such opposites as the swarthy Moor and the delicate aristocratic beauty of Venice. Upon this threefold situation is brought to bear the brooding suspiciousness of Iago, and we get a threefold intrigue. Against Roderigo it is the intrigue of the sharper and his dupe; Roderigo is baited with specious hopes, while he turns his estate into costly jewels, which get no farther than the coffers of Iago. As to Cassio, Iago has a double plot: he seeks to oust him from an office he desires for himself; yet more, he seeks to get rid altogether of a man the daily beauty in whose life makes Iago seem ugly.[1] The third intrigue is against Othello: the soul of Iago, sodden with jealous suspicion, has conceived the impossible idea that Othello has wronged him with his wife Æmilia;[2] and Iago resolves to make Othello in his turn feel what the pangs of jealousy mean. And here the treatment of intrigue is different from what we have seen in the other plays. Instead of these intrigues conflicting with one another, Iago, by a few simple devices, is able to make them all coöperate in one single monster intrigue. By the simple suggestion to Roderigo that Desdemona is in love with Cassio the two first intrigues become one:[3] Roderigo, maddened at the idea, is easily persuaded, at the risk of some bodily suffering, to provoke a quarrel with Cassio when on military duty, and by the scandal that ensues Cassio loses his position; at the same time it is by employing Roderigo, and giving him a sense of doing something in the pursuit of Desdemona, that Iago keeps his hold on Roderigo's purse. Later Iago sets Roderigo on to attacking Cassio by night, Iago himself being at hand to secure, as he hopes, the death of both.[4] Again, by choosing the name of Cassio as the name to suggest to Othello in connection with dark insinuations against the honour of Desdemona, Iago makes the second and third intrigues into one; by a sort of economy of villany it is brought about that all done towards racking Othello's heart with jealous

[1] V. i. 19.
[2] I. iii, from 392; II. i, from 295.
[3] From II. i. 220.
[4] IV. ii, from 173; V. i.

misery is so much done towards bringing Cassio into danger, making him the victim of one who is as powerful to destroy as he is maddened with sense of injury. Not only have the four intrigues become one, but also the other threads making up the plot have been interwoven with them: Roderigo's mad pursuit of Desdemona has added impetus to the schemes of Iago; the force that linked Desdemona to Othello has become a sundering force when love has corrupted into jealousy; even the affair of Cassio and Bianca[1] is by accident made to lend a touch of impulse to the swelling current of suspicion. Thus all the trains of action move to a common culmination in a tragic climax. But an unexpected part of this tragic climax is the reaction of the intrigues upon the intriguer. It is here that irony begins to appear; and it is a triple irony. The dark plotting of Iago is at last betrayed to Othello — and by whom? It is Iago's wife Æmilia whose simplicity hits upon the truth that none of the rest have seen; Iago, vainly seeking to stop the revelation, when it has come out, in a moment's frenzy stabs his wife. Here is the first irony: when first Iago conceived his groundless suspicions, he vowed he would be "evened with Othello, wife for wife";[2] in a sense very different from what he meant his words have been fulfilled; his devilish machinations have led Othello to slay Desdemona, and, in the rebound of this tragedy, Iago has come to slay his own Æmilia, and is thus "evened with Othello, wife for wife." The second irony has reference to Roderigo: Iago had contrived his death to prevent his own betrayal; and from the pocket of the slain Roderigo is taken the paper which makes the final link in the chain of evidence against Iago.[3] Yet again, Iago had plotted against Cassio's office and his life: Cassio just escapes with his life, succeeds Othello in the office of governor, and his first official act is to superintend the torturing of Iago.[4]

Here is the doublesidedness of situation and mockery in events

[1] III. iv, from 168; IV. i, from 151.
[2] II. i. 308.
[3] Compare V. i. 15, and V. ii. 308.
[4] V. ii. 332–335.

which make irony; but there is a difference from what has so far appeared. It is not so much the irony of circumstances as the irony of fate. In comedy, the irony depended upon the dramatic spectator who was, so to speak, in the confidence of the story, and held in his hands the two sides of the situation of which actors in the story saw only one side. But in this play, the suggestion is as if fate — or providence, or the general course of events — was itself the spectator, holding the clue to the issue, which it made known in a shock of irony only when the issue was visibly determined. And such irony as this has a great part in securing the dramatic satisfaction with which such a tragedy closes. If we look merely at the bare events, we find all parties evened in a common ruin; the innocent Desdemona and the nobly erring Othello are just as certainly overthrown as the stupid Roderigo and Iago the arch-villain. But, for a difference, a halo of pathos surrounds the fallen Othello and Desdemona; not entirely free from error, they have nevertheless perished because they are too nobly trustful for the evil surroundings in which they are placed. But in the fall of Roderigo and Iago — in the spectacle of lust slain by craft, craft overwhelmed in the ruins of its own craftiness — there is no redeeming pathos, but only the bitterness of mocking nemesis; they have lived the life of villains, and the irony of fate has at last shown them up for fools.

XII

THE MOMENTUM OF CHARACTER AND THE SWAY OF CIRCUMSTANCE

Personal will, we have seen in the preceding chapter, is the most obvious of the forces moving the moral world; and it has its dramatic representation in intrigue and irony. Our next question is of other forces that tend to limit individual will. Two expressions rise naturally to the tongue as expressing the modification of individual action — heredity and environment. We have to consider the relation of these to the moral system of Shakespeare.

The force of heredity does not seem to be prominent in Shakespeare's world: we should rather say that it is conspicuous by its absence. Perhaps the strongest form of heredity is racial influence, and a chapter of this work[1] has been devoted to certain racial characteristics of Roman life; yet, as successive periods of Roman history were portrayed in the three plays, we saw the specially Roman view of life yielding steadily before the growing freedom of individuality, racial heredity becoming diluted by advancing cosmopolitanism. Again, we know both the parents of Hamlet, and the divided character of the hero might suggest that the strength inherited from his father was modified by weakness derived from his mother. Yet the same play gives us the two brothers, as unlike "as Hyperion to a satyr," with nothing in the way of ancestry to account for the difference. Similarly, nothing is suggested to explain why Henry of Monmouth should be so diverse from his brothers; or why

[1] Chapter VI.

such a father as Bolingbroke should have such a son as Henry; or why such a son as Hotspur should come from such parents as the hesitating Northumberland and his unwarlike wife. Difference of maternity, of course, would account for the differences between Edgar and Edmund in *King Lear*, or between the prince and Don John in *Much Ado*, or between Faulconbridge and the rightful heir in *King John*. But this is not suggested to explain why Lear should have daughters so different, nor why there should be such opposite characters in the family of Sir Rowland de Boys. It seems strange that Cymbeline should be the father of such a daughter as Imogen, and such sons as the two stolen boys; in the same play the very courtiers remark upon the difficulty of heredity in such a case as the Queen and Cloten —

> — that such a crafty devil as is his mother
> Should yield the world this ass!

In saying this I do not mean to suggest that Shakespeare is in any way untrue to life; in the world of the actual it is clear that heredity serves as a very uncertain criterion for the analysis of individuality. Where the question is of pigeons, or even of race horses, the qualities in consideration are so comparatively simple that careful breeding may produce very definite results. In human nature the force of heredity is displayed chiefly in the lower stages of civilisation; as we rise higher in the scale of personality tokens of hereditary resemblance approach nearer and nearer to curiosities. In any case, there is no need to dwell long upon this topic. Our question is, not simply the facts of the Shakespearean world, but the representation of those facts in dramatic forms; and I am unable to see that any element of dramatic form is associated with the expression of heredity, as this term is generally understood.

There is, however, something, not usually comprised under the term 'heredity' and yet closely akin to it, which plays a great part in every dramatic system. In the number of a man's ancestors we ought in strictness to reckon the man himself; not only is

"the boy the father to the man," but the past of each individual life is in some sort an ancestor to his present and his future. Heredity is habit writ large: certain repeated actions have by repetition become easy, they pass into tendencies, they stiffen into habits; and such habits can be transmitted from one individual to another, whether by the force of imitation, or of training, or perhaps by physical propagation. In the same way, if we take a single life at any point of its history, we shall find accumulated tendencies and habits which are passing on from the past to the future of that life as forces, exerting just such influences as would be exerted by habits and qualities derived by that life from ancestral lives. Such tendencies transmitted from the past to the present will be varied, and often mutually antagonistic; but as we compare and set one against another we are usually able to strike a balance, or determine a mathematical resultant of them all, which we call the individual's 'character': the mark or stamp distinguishing him from other individuals. Obviously, character is one of the forces of life, and a force modifying free individual action; we call the man a free agent, yet we expect that he will act according to his 'character.' The exact nature of character as a force may be expressed by the word *momentum*. Steam or other power has set a wheel in motion; when the power is withdrawn the motion continues, and must continue until the acquired momentum is counteracted by friction or other forces. Similarly, a man's character is the momentum of his past: new influences may change the character, but in the absence of these the character acquired in the past is a real force carrying the individual in definite directions.

It is hardly necessary to remark that character is one of the universally recognised elements of dramatic effect. The position then of character as one of the forces modifying personal will becomes important in the moral system of the Shakespearean world. The poet has given us two specially interesting studies of this topic, the momentum of character: one may be briefly stated, the other will need detailed analysis.

The Caskets Story in *The Merchant of Venice* is a dramatised problem.[1] The hand of Portia, and all her wealth, is by her father's will destined to the suitor who shall choose rightly between three caskets. What grounds of choice are there for the successive candidates? One casket is of gold, another of silver, a third of lead; the golden casket has the inscription —

> Who chooseth me shall gain what many men desire.

There is another inscription for the silver casket —

> Who chooseth me shall get as much as he deserves.

Yet another inscription is on the casket of lead —

> Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath.

If there is an inclination to connect the metal of the casket with the idea of success or failure, this may be overthrown by some different suggestions from the mottoes; if after elaborate balancing of metal against motto and motto against metal ingenuity can still find some preponderance in favour of one alternative, there is yet a further doubt whether — in what presents itself as a puzzle to guess — the preponderance may not have been anticipated by the testator who propounds the puzzle, and so discounted. To all appearance the prize of Portia is staked upon absolute chance.

Such is the problem; what is the solution as worked out in the incident dramatised? We are permitted to hear in part the train of argument by which each suitor, as he thinks, is being led to his decision; all the while we are in a position to see that, not their reasoning, but their whole character in reality fixes their choice. The prince of Morocco has been moulded by royal position in a country in which royalty is a sort of divinity: anything below gold is secretly repugnant to him, however he may reason; moreover, his soliloquy betrays that

[1] This has been worked out at length in my *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist*, Chapter I.

the desire of many men has been the real bait to bring him from his distant home, and not the worth of Portia. The prince of Arragon has been stamped into a character by aristocracy, and its theory of the rule of desert:

> O . . . that clear honour
> Were purchased by the merit of the wearer!
> How many then should cover that stand bare!
> How many be commanded that command!
> How much low peasantry would then be glean'd
> From the true seed of honour! and how much honour
> Pick'd from the chaff and ruin of the times
> To be new-varnish'd!

Accordingly he 'assumes desert': and the silver casket betrays him. Bassanio alone has come in the character of a true lover, to whom the giving and hazarding of all for his love is more blessed than any receiving. Thus the incident as a whole — under the appearance of men reasoning in an issue where we see reasoning is a futile weighing of evenly balanced alternatives — in reality presents the momentum of character: the respective characters of three men, formed by the reasonings and choices of their whole past, have had force to carry them over a crisis in which conscious choice was no more than a self-deception.

But for the momentum of character the supreme illustration is the career of Macbeth. In appreciating character as a force the first step is to form a clear conception of the particular individuality in its essential features. Here a difficulty arises: the popular conception of Macbeth is one which, as it appears to me, is wholly at variance with the evidence of the play. It dates from the period when Shakespeare, ignored by the scholarship of the age, was left to the theatre; and, naturally, the bias of stage interpretation is rather towards what is impressive in the acting than what rests upon the weighing of evidence. This traditional reading of the hero — apart from the question of its correctness — is no doubt interesting in itself. It is that

of a great soul overborne by external influence: some say, the influence of his wife; others would put it, the temptation of the Witches; yet others would combine the two. Such a view of Macbeth appears to me in flat contradiction to the text of the play. A single passage[1] is sufficient to disprove it, while the view of the hero suggested in that passage is in harmony with all that appears of Macbeth from beginning to end. Let us commence by examining this crucial point of the drama.

The situation is that Macbeth is debating whether he shall not drop the plan that has been arranged for Duncan's murder; Lady Macbeth is holding her husband to the plot. In answer to a taunt of cowardice Macbeth has spoken big words:

> I dare do all that may become a man;
> Who dares do more is none.

Unfortunately, Lady Macbeth is able to make this rejoinder:

> What beast was't then
> That made you break this enterprise to me? . . .
> Nor time nor place
> Did then adhere, and yet you would make both:
> They have made themselves.

Macbeth does not contradict: we have it then, on the admission of the parties themselves, that it was Macbeth who proposed the murder of Duncan to his wife, and not Lady Macbeth to her husband. When was this proposal made? Since the opening of the drama Macbeth and his wife have not been together until the day when the above words are spoken. The reference cannot be to some interview earlier in the same day, because of the note of time Lady Macbeth gives —

[1] *Macbeth*: I. vii, from 29. Mrs. Siddons [quoted in the Variorum (second) edition, page 473] says, "There can be no doubt that Macbeth, in the first instance, suggested the design of assassinating the King."

Nor time nor place
Did then adhere, etc.

These words can apply only to the visit of Duncan; and this visit was arranged, and made known by Macbeth to his wife, before Macbeth arrived at his castle.[1] Nor can the proposal of treason — as I have sometimes heard it suggested — have been made in the letter sent to Lady Macbeth.[2] It would seem to be a purposeless absurdity that a man should *write* a suggestion of treason and murder to a wife he will presently see; moreover, we hear Lady Macbeth reading the letter, which seems to be all about the meeting with the Witches; when it has been read, Lady Macbeth's comment implies just the absence of what it is suggested that the letter might have contained:

I do fear thy nature;
It is too full o' the milk of human kindness
To catch the nearest way.

There is no escape from the conclusion that, at some time before the commencement of the drama, and thus before the meeting between Macbeth and the Witches, Macbeth had opened the scheme of murder to his wife. One thing more is implied by this important passage. Lady Macbeth goes on to use strange language.

I have given suck, and know
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:
I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums,
And dashed the brains out, had I so sworn as you
Have done to this.

It appears then that Macbeth's 'breaking' of the enterprise to his wife was no cautious suggestion of treason, but a violent oath of resolve. How can the popular tradition of Macbeth, as a soul ruined by others, stand against the positive revelation of this passage, which carries us back to a period before the com-

[1] Compare I. v. 32–38. [2] In I. v.

mencement of the play, before the meeting of Macbeth with the Witches, and exhibits him as breaking to his wife a scheme of treason and murder, and swearing to it with a violence which the startled wife can convey only by using the most terrible image that a mother's mind could call up?

When this traditional misapprehension has been cleared out of the way, it is not difficult to form a definite conception for the character of Shakespeare's Macbeth. So far as an individual character can ever be summed up in a single phrase, Macbeth is the man of action. In our antithesis of the outer and inner life, this personage would stand for one side of the antithesis alone. Like Shakespeare's Julius Cæsar, an exact converse to Shakespeare's Hamlet, Macbeth is strong, quick, full of resource, in moments of action; feeble and vacillating in moments of thinking and introspection. To differentiate the character still further, two other salient features may be noted, though they are natural consequences of the first. As a man of action Macbeth is specially discomposed by suspense, the time of strong feeling where there is no outlet in deeds. Again, it is an age of superstition: unlike Banquo, who doubts, but doubts with an open mind, and unlike Lady Macbeth, who ignores the supernatural altogether, Macbeth himself is a prey to superstition; the absence of any inner life of his own has left him defenceless against what his age accepts. These three things — magnificent capacity for action, intolerance of suspense, proneness to superstition — make a definite conception for the character of Shakespeare's Macbeth, and become a triple clue by which it can be recognised in all its phases of development.

We are now to watch the character so defined gathering force and momentum as it passes through successive stages of the story. Four stages may be recognised in the developing activity of Macbeth. His first crime (the murder of Duncan) is a thing of long premeditation and brooding, with several fluctuations of purpose. The second crime (the murder of the grooms) is the impulse of a single moment. With the third crime (the

murder of Banquo) we find something like deliberate enjoyment of slaughter. In the fourth stage Macbeth's life is all crime: he is hurried from one violence to another by irresistible frenzy. And, side by side with this increasing capacity for evil action, we can see in the hero of the play how suspense grows from an uncomfortable feeling to a torturing and settled disease; we can see again how the superstition, which at first was only a wonder, comes in time to be for Macbeth his sole refuge and trust.

Our earliest knowledge of Macbeth, derived from the passage of the play analysed above, is that he has devoted himself by mighty oath to treason against his king, the time for executing the treason being in some future not yet seen. Meanwhile Macbeth has become the hero of a successful war; returning from this war he is met by the Witches,[1] who hail him as thane of Glamis, thane of Cawdor, and finally add —

Thou shalt be KING hereafter!

Macbeth starts: how is this start to be interpreted? The ordinary view of the hero reads this start as the shock of temptation, that moment first presented. But it must be remembered that there was nothing strange or guilty in the words of the Witches; Banquo, who is present, and of course reflects the ideas of the time, sees nothing sinister.

Banquo. Good sir, why do you start, and seem to fear
Things that do sound so fair?

The crown in the days of our story did not descend according to fixed rules; it was at the moment probable enough that one so high in the line of succession (though not the highest) should come in time to wear the crown; it was as natural for fortune-tellers to promise Lord Macbeth the throne as it would have been for them to promise a young maid a handsome husband. But when we know that Macbeth, according to Shakespeare's handling of the story, had actually sworn before this to the crime

[1] I. iii, from 38.

that would take King Duncan's life, then we easily understand the start of Macbeth, as he finds the purpose he supposed to be the secret of his wife and himself already outside him, seeming to glitter in the malicious gleams of a witch's laugh. The incident continues: messengers bring Macbeth tidings of his elevation to the thaneships of Glamis and Cawdor; naturally, such a testimony to the prevision of the Weird Sisters plunges Macbeth in thought.[1]

> This supernatural soliciting
> Cannot be ill, cannot be good: if ill,
> Why hath it given me earnest of success,
> Commencing in a truth? I am thane of Cawdor:
> If good, why do I yield to that suggestion
> Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair
> And make my seated heart knock at my ribs
> Against the use of nature? Present fears
> Are less than horrible imaginings;
> My thought, whose murder —

(I interrupt to inquire, whence has Macbeth caught the idea of *murder?* whence, of *horrible imaginings?* Not from the innocent prediction of the Witches: there were many ways — succession, election — by which without improbability this kinsman of the King might succeed to the crown. It is from Macbeth's own guilty past that all these items of conspiracy have been fetched. But let the soliloquy continue.)

> My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,
> Shakes so my single state of man that function
> Is smother'd in surmise, and nothing is
> But what is not.

We are watching Macbeth shaken by suspense; the commonplace flattery of the Witch has wakened the sleeping treason, and to a nature like Macbeth's a fearful deed present for the doing is more easy to bear than the imagination of the deed in the future. But at this point the current of thought changes.

[1] I. iii, from 130.

> If chance will have me king, why, chance may crown me,
> Without my stir.

If the natural course of events — as the Witches say, and it never occurs to Macbeth to doubt their insight into the future — is going to bring the crown to Macbeth, why should he meddle with such dangerous matter as treason and murder? The latter train of thought prevails: Macbeth will wait.

> Come what come may,
> Time and the hour runs through the roughest day.

Thus the final effect of the meeting between Macbeth and the Witches is the opposite of what the popular view of the play suggests: Macbeth drops the treason he had formerly sworn to execute, and is content to wait on events.

He soon resumes his treasonable plans; but why? because of a fresh appeal to his practical nature. This is a proclamation of a Prince of Cumberland,[1] — the title of an heir apparent to the Scotch throne, as the title Prince of Wales still describes the heir apparent to the throne of England. Such an incident removes Macbeth's chance of attaining the crown by natural succession; he must fall back upon his former guilty purpose.

> The Prince of Cumberland! that is a step
> On which I must fall down, or else o'erleap,
> For in my way it lies. Stars, hide your fires;
> Let not light see my black and deep desires:
> The eye wink at the hand: yet let that be,
> Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see.

Now opportunity presents itself, in the unexpected visit of King Duncan to his subject's castle. As Macbeth, in advance of Duncan, enters his castle, he is met by his wife with the words:

> You shall put
> This night's great business into my dispatch.[2]

[1] I. iv, from 35. [2] I. v. 68.

As a result of this step on the part of Lady Macbeth the man of action is left with nothing to do; all the interval of waiting till night shall make murder possible is for Macbeth a period of prolonged suspense, and he is accordingly plunged in vacillation and dread. This explains his extraordinary conduct in leaving the table at which his king is supping,[1] and going aside to pour out his feverish thoughts in soliloquy. The famous soliloquy[2] of Macbeth has been so grandly worded by the poet as to cast a glamour of grandeur upon the speaker. But if we look at the naked thought beneath the clothing of words, we find nothing but the practical man's weighing of practical consequences. Macbeth says to himself distinctly that it would be well to do the deed, if only he could be secured against the consequences; against the consequences in this life, for he would "jump the life to come." Macbeth sees clearly that the murder of the King would outrage loyalty, hospitality, pity, kinship; but his thought is as to the effect of these outraged feelings on others, in setting all Scotland weeping; he shows no sign of revolting against such outrage in his own heart. At this point[3] his wife joins Macbeth; and the scene becomes increasingly significant. Those who hold the traditional view of the play are accustomed to lay special stress upon this phase of the story; here, at least, (they say) we have Macbeth seeking to abandon his treason, and his wife holding him to his purpose. But careful study of the text will not support this view: Macbeth's words have their reference, not to abandoning treason, but to postponing it. We have seen that it is Macbeth himself who originated the purpose to murder Duncan; Lady Macbeth is responsible for one particular plan of execution — the murder of the King in her castle that very night. The dialogue at this point turns upon the latter only: Macbeth sees the risk of such a project, and would drop it and trust to some future opportunity.

Macbeth. We will proceed no further in this business.[4]

[1] I. vii. 29.
[2] I. vii. 1–28.
[3] I. vii. 29.
[4] I. vii. 31; compare I. v. 68.

(The reader will remember Lady Macbeth's phrase in a preceding scene: "You shall put this night's great business into my dispatch.")

Macbeth. He hath honour'd me of late; and I have bought
Golden opinions from all sorts of people,
Which would be worn now in their newest gloss,
Not cast aside so soon.[1]

Macbeth has just been elevated in rank, and is at the height of his popularity; with a dreadful instinct of economy the practical man suggests it would be well to get all that can be got out of these advantages, before risking them by a suspicious deed. What other meaning can the words bear? If it is suggested that compunction of conscience and sense of gratitude to Duncan are rising in Macbeth, how ridiculous the sentence becomes! it can only be paraphrased thus: Duncan has been kind to me, and I must not murder him *so soon!* These words *so soon* are of themselves sufficient proof that the question is of postponing, not of abandoning treason. The scene proceeds with the passage already analysed. We have the taunt, the rejoinder, the reminder of Macbeth's original proposal and violent oath. At last the real thought of Macbeth comes out —

If we should fail?[2]

Then Lady Macbeth puts her full scheme before her husband — to drug the tired grooms and make the deed seem theirs. Macbeth's practical instinct seizes a feasible scheme, he interrupts his wife, and finishes her plan for her; with admiring exultation he accepts the murder plan, and never hesitates until it is accomplished.

It is now a period of action,[3] and Macbeth is seen in his strength; as he stands in the castle yard at night, waiting for his wife's signal, his words breathe exultation and a sense of mastery. Here we get the first of several phenomena which

[1] I. vii. 32–35. [2] I. vii. 59. [3] II. i, ii.

illustrate the peculiar psychology of Macbeth — his tendency to project his thoughts in objective forms; it is part of his general superstition that he has such difficulty in separating between objective and subjective, in distinguishing quickened imagination from external reality. In this early stage, however, Macbeth has some control over superstition; when his intentness upon murder has taken form as a dagger floating in the air and marshalling him the way that he is going, he does question whether it is a false creation, or whether his eyes are worth all the rest of his senses. It is noteworthy that in this, as in other cases of the same phenomenon, the objective form changes with the changing thoughts of Macbeth; as the excited imagination hurries from beginning to end of the deed, the appearance of the dagger undergoes a corresponding variation:

> I see thee still;
> And on thy blade and dudgeon gouts of blood,
> Which was not so before.[1]

The intense stillness is broken by the signal bell: unhesitatingly Macbeth passes into the sacred apartments of his royal guest, lightly snatches the daggers from the heavily snoring grooms, with a warrior's sureness of stroke plunges them into the King's body, and draws them forth streaming with blood.[2] The boundary of murder is passed: what response will the universe make? A sleepy laugh: a nightmare cry of 'Murder'; two sleepers half awaking; a 'God bless us!' and an 'Amen': these weird omens quiver through the superstitious soul of a warrior who would have known how to encounter a room full of rousing guards. But there is more than superstition: Macbeth, who can never endure a single moment's suspense, must *wait*,[3] until the half-wakened sleepers have slept again. Intent on the one question, whether the guards are yet asleep, Macbeth finds

[1] II. i. 45.

[2] The scene in the King's chamber has to be inferred from details in II. ii.

[3] Compare II. ii. 24: "I *stood* and heard them."

his thoughts travelling outside him, and becoming objective as a voice:[1]

Sleep no more!
Macbeth does murder sleep . . .

As Macbeth whispers the incident to his wife he cannot make her understand, he cannot make us understand, whether this was a real voice, how much was his own thought. But as he stands in panic of suspense the shriek of an owl[2] above his head plunges him into the depths of demoralisation, and, forgetful of all, he speaks aloud[3] as he springs down the steps to reach the courtyard. Amid the tempest that just begins to howl Macbeth incoherently seeks to make known what has happened; reminded that he has spoiled the plot by bringing the grooms' daggers[4] away he is helpless to repair the mistake, and his wife must do what the warrior dares not face. The tempest is now furious: but through its howlings is heard the knocking of those who are come to wake the King; so demoralised still is Macbeth, through his moment of suspense and shock of ill omen, that he has a vague fear that this knocking will wake the King, until the approach of a call to act steadies his brain, and he realises the whole situation:

Wake Duncan with thy knocking! I would thou couldst!

There is an interval of a minute or two — it cannot be more[5] — and Macbeth appears before us again a totally changed man. The chamberlains entering the courtyard encounter their host as a nobleman of dignified bearing: the man of action easily attains self-control when it is a question of meeting an emergency in the presence of his fellow-men. The awful discovery is made, and loud-voiced consternation rouses the castle: Macbeth plays perfectly his rôle of startled innocence. He seizes the hand of Lennox, and the two rush to the scene of death, as if to

[1] II. ii. 35. [2] II. ii. 16. [3] II. ii. 17. [4] II. ii, from 48.
[5] The *knocking within* makes Scenes ii and iii (of Act II) continuous.

see whether the tidings can be true.[1] But a moment of crisis is awaiting Macbeth. The two nobles leave the courtyard together, and return together: it can be but a single second that Macbeth lingers behind in the royal chamber after Lennox has left it. But that instant was a moment of horrible suspense: there were the grooms heavily sleeping, soon to be roughly wakened and given opportunity to tell their tale: the guilty man cannot wait, but in overpowering impulse of action stabs the grooms, and thereby ruins the deeply laid plot. It is true that when he has recovered himself in the presence of the courtiers listening to Lennox's horrified description of the scene, Macbeth almost repairs his blunder by the innocent way in which he makes known what he has done.[2]

Macbeth. O, yet I do repent me of my fury,
That I did kill them.
Macduff. Wherefore did you so?
Macbeth. Who can be wise, amazed, temperate and furious,
Loyal and neutral, in a moment? . . . Here lay Duncan,
His silver skin laced with his golden blood,
And his gash'd stabs look'd like a breach in nature
For ruin's wasteful entrance: there, the murderers
Steep'd in the colours of their trade . . .

It is a splendid piece of acting, but of no avail: every hearer seizes the truth, and it is only accident that saves Macbeth. Lady Macbeth's timely fainting[3] produces a moment's diversion, and the courtiers feel they must pause[4] before determining the question of guilt: in that hour's pause the flight of the King's sons turns suspicion in another direction,[5] and instead of holding Macbeth guilty the nobles call him to the throne.

Our review of the story has passed through two out of the four stages of Macbeth's life. We have seen how his first crime was the close of a long period of brooding and of changing pur-

[1] II. iii, from 70.
[2] II. iii. 112.
[3] II. iii. 123.
[4] II. iii, from 132.
[5] Compare II. iii. 127–129 with II. iv. 22–32.

pose; when once he had passed the boundary line between innocence and guilt the evil in Macbeth had attained a sudden impetus, and the murder of the grooms was the suggestion and execution of a single moment of time. We pass to a third stage, in which evil will have gained a still surer hold upon the sinner. But our first note of this third stage is the way in which the feeling of suspense, hitherto a thing of recurrence, has now become to Macbeth a continuous agony.

Macbeth. We have scotch'd the snake, not kill'd it . . .
But let the frame of things disjoint, both the worlds suffer,
Ere we will eat our meal in fear, and sleep
In the affliction of these terrible dreams
That shake us nightly: better be with the dead,
Whom we, to gain our peace, have sent to peace,
Than on the torture of the mind to lie
In restless ecstasy.[1]

It is indeed this torture of suspense which leads to Macbeth's third crime, the murder of Banquo. For we must distinguish: the precise issue here is not simply the slaying of Banquo — sooner or later the rivalry of the two men must have ended in violence[2] — but the slaying of Banquo at the precise moment when he is slain. The time is so close to the death of Duncan that it would be impossible but that the one crime should draw attention to the other; in actual fact, one scene[3] of the play brings out, in the innuendoes of Lennox, that the suspicions diverted from Macbeth by the flight of Duncan's sons are all brought back again by the murder of Banquo. How comes it that the politic Macbeth acts so rashly? The clue is given in his words to his rival:[4]

We hear, our bloody cousins are bestow'd
In England and in Ireland, not confessing
Their cruel parricide, filling their hearers

[1] III. ii. 13.
[2] Compare III. i. 49–72.
[3] III. vi.
[4] III. i. 30.

With strange invention: but of that to-morrow,
When therewithal we shall have cause of state
Craving us jointly.

It appears that the time is the day preceding a Council of State in which the King and his nobles must hear for the first time the representations of Duncan's sons, who at present are supposed by all to be the murderers of their father. Precisely as in the matter of the grooms, Macbeth cannot endure the suspense of waiting for the critical moment; and this torturing suspense impels him, in the face of every reason of policy to the contrary, to get rid of the most formidable of the councillors. As to its mode of operation, this third crime of Macbeth displays deliberate contrivance, appreciation of professional murderers as tools of crime, and even a suggestion of the artistic enjoyment that comes with facility.[1] Macbeth will not in plain terms reveal his purpose to his wife, but this is the tone in which he speaks of it.

Then be thou jocund: ere the bat hath flown
His cloister'd flight, ere to black Hecate's summons
The shard-borne beetle with his drowsy hums
Hath rung night's yawning peal, there shall be done
A deed of dreadful note . . . Come, seeling night,
Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day;
And with thy bloody and invisible hand
Cancel and tear to pieces that great bond
Which keeps me pale! Light thickens; and the crow
Makes wing to the rooky wood:
Good things of day begin to droop and drowse;
Whiles night's black agents to their preys do rouse.
Thou marvell'st at my words: but hold thee still;
Things bad begun make strong themselves by ill.

It is in the reaction from this third crime that we see most clearly the advancing hold of superstition upon Macbeth. From

[1] Compare, generally, III. i, from 72; and III. ii, from 37.

the first he has taken for granted the supernatural, as represented in the oracles of the Weird Sisters; and from the first we have noted his tendency to project his thoughts as external sights and sounds. But in the case of the airy dagger Macbeth could question; even when he describes the voice crying, "Sleep no more," he at least leaves a confusion between thought and sound. But in the apparition of Banquo's Ghost Macbeth has lost all power to discriminate between objective and subjective. It is only an apparition: no eye sees it but Macbeth's, and the stage-directions are only intended to assist us as to what Macbeth is supposed to see. Yet not only is Macbeth slow in realising this fact, even after his wife has spoken to him, but from beginning to end of the scene his peculiar psychology is illustrated, and successive stages of his thinking reflect themselves in successive modifications of the apparition.

It is necessary to analyse the scene[1] with some minuteness. We must imagine a banqueting chamber, and a table of horseshoe shape, the curved end towards the side of the chamber adjoining the kitchen and offices, where a crowd of servants are standing; the other end flanked by two chairs of state, and pointing towards the hall in which the guests are assembling. Macbeth leads the procession into the banqueting chamber, and ceremoniously hands his queen to one of the chairs of state; instead of taking the other himself he passes forward with the words:

> Ourself will mingle with society
> And play the humble host.
> Our hostess keeps her state.

To the guests this seems no more than an act of graceful condescension; Macbeth's real purpose in keeping for himself the middle seat at the curved end of the horseshoe is to be near the crowd of servants, so that he can, without difficulty, communicate with the messenger he is so anxiously awaiting. Even before

[1] III. iv.

he has taken his seat he catches sight of the murderer; forgetting state, he passes on to him and says:

There's blood upon thy face.

We may be sure that a professional bravo would know his business better than to pass through a crowd of servants with tokens of crime about him: the blood is of course in Macbeth's imagination. The news is spoken, and the fearful shock of safety and danger mixed makes the King's brain reel. But a voice from the Queen recalls him to the duties of host, and Macbeth, advancing toward the table, resolves — with the quickness of a man of action — to prepare beforehand for the inevitable discovery, and let the court know his devotion to Banquo. As he speaks his words of regret for the absence of their chief guest, the apparition fills the vacant seat in the centre of the curve. Macbeth is still standing between the table and the servants: what he sees is only the form of the ghostly figure, indistinguishable from any other figure of a guest; as he says, the table simply seems full. But when other guests point to the empty chair, we must suppose that the apparition turns and faces his murderer.

Macbeth. Which of you have done this?
Lords. What, my good lord?
Macbeth. Thou canst not say I did it: never shake
Thy gory locks at me.

Evidently the apparition has undergone a change: had there been "gory locks" upon the head at first, Macbeth could not have mistaken it for the figure of an ordinary guest in pronouncing the table full. In the wild scene that follows still further change is evident.

Macbeth. The times have been
That, when the brains were out, the man would die,
And there an end; but now they rise again,
With twenty mortal murders on their crowns.

The murderer in describing the deed to Macbeth had spoken of "twenty trenched gashes on his head, the least a death to nature": [1] the detail has sunk in Macbeth's excited mind, and reproduced itself in the apparition. In time, Macbeth is made to understand that no eye but his own has seen the ghost. There is now one more chance for the man of action to recover the ground lost by his blunder. Macbeth will pursue his policy [2] of speaking endearingly of Banquo: hitherto he has been taken by surprise, supposing that all recognised the ghost, but now he determines by force of will to keep down his tremors, and bravely face the apparition, which he knows his words will recall. So he strains his nerves, and proposes the health of Banquo. The ghost reappears: but in what form?

Macbeth. Avaunt! and quit my sight! let the earth hide thee!
Thy bones are marrowless, thy blood is cold;
Thou hast no speculation in those eyes
Which thou dost glare with.

The idea of blood and murder in general, the idea of Banquo as a living man like other men, Banquo bleeding, Banquo pierced with twenty mortal wounds, Banquo a corpse dead and mouldering in the grave: these are naturally the successive stages of Macbeth's thought at this crisis, and these are the successive forms presented by the apparition, which only the criminal's own brain has created. So completely has imagination now become reality.

We have reached the fourth and last stage of Macbeth's career. It is now no longer a question of single crimes: a daily diet [3] of violence and horror afflicts Scotland; beholders speak of madness or valiant fury; Macbeth himself expresses the accelerated impetus of his downward rush, as he says that his deeds must be acted ere they may be scanned.[4] Before this point superstition has been his ruin; yet from the scene of the

[1] III. iv. 27.
[2] From line 88.
[3] IV. iii. 4.
[4] III. iv. 140.

apparition he betakes himself to the Weird Sisters,[1] and makes the supernatural his sole refuge. But what are we to say as to the third note of Macbeth's character? Already suspense had become to him a settled state of torture; in his final stage the torture of suspense yields to its opposite. The Witches delude their victim with ambiguous oracles: Macbeth feels a sense of calm trust replacing his gnawing dread.[2]

> Sweet bodements! good!
> Rebellion's head, rise never till the wood
> Of Birnam rise, and our high-placed Macbeth
> Shall live the lease of nature, pay his breath
> To time and mortal custom.

It is just as, in a physical body decaying with disease, there comes a point where agonising pain gives place to a numbness, which means mortification. Beyond the stage of painful suspense there comes to Macbeth the stage of sweet security, which is the mortification of the soul. And from such security Macbeth is awakened only by the shock of final ruin.

Such then is the clearly marked character of this famous hero of Shakespearean drama, and such is the movement through which, with ever increasing force, that character is hurried. He is the man of action, intolerant of suspense, defenceless against popular superstition. Crime draws him on through stages of long hesitation, of sudden impulse, of satisfied acceptance, of headlong passion. At first he can reason with suspense, then it becomes an unmanning bewilderment in which he ruins the scheme he has so much admired; then suspense becomes a chronic disease; finally it yields to the more terrible opposite stage of blind security. Superstition is, at first, one of the sources to which Macbeth looks for guidance; later, ominous words of sleepers are enough to drive him from mastery of a crisis to helpless imbecility; soon he is unable to distinguish superstition and reality; at last, superstition is his only hope.

[1] III. iv. 132. [2] IV. i. 96.

By free choice and wilful passion Macbeth has embraced for himself a career of crime; when once he has brought his life to the point of passing from purpose to murderous deed, he has attained a terrible momentum of character which hurls him to his ruin.

Heredity is a limitation upon personal will from within; a corresponding limitation from without is expressed by the term 'environment.' In a sense, the whole universe may be considered as the environment of each individual in it. The present chapter, however, confines itself to the more immediate environment that we call circumstance; remoter forces will be treated later.

The influence of circumstances upon individual action is a thing too obvious to be interesting, too multiform to admit of analysis. Here, as in other cases, our question is whether there is any association of dramatic form with the force of circumstance. Those who take an interest in the analysis of plot will recognise something which answers to this description. Shakespeare's plots are harmonies of several stories, or, as they are technically called, actions, combined in a single design. When a plot has been analysed into its constituent actions, there is generally one of these which is of a different character from all the rest; it is the Enveloping Action lying outside the others, and seeming to envelop them, like the frame of a picture or the fringe round a pattern. This element of dramatic plot corresponds to something in real life. The main force in life (we have seen) is individual will; but the individual is a part of the state or community, and this state has a life and a movement of its own, a broader sphere of action in which the personal actions proper to stories are merged. To take the simplest illustration. A story turns upon the love of a man and a maiden; the rise and progress of this love, its difficulties, interruptions, and happy restoration. Perhaps there is nothing that these two individuals think less about than the politics of the country in which they

reside. Yet the course of its political history may greatly affect the story of love: war may break out, the lovers may be separated, separations may produce jealousy and rivalry: after all, the course of true love may have run smoothly or roughly according to the twists and turns of political history. The enveloping action in fiction is usually just what we call 'history,' as distinguished from 'story'; if not exactly history, it is some sphere of action larger and broader than the individual interests which are the proper sphere of story.

In the play of *Richard the Third* we saw how the enveloping action was the Wars of the Roses; the details making up the matter of the drama are so many items in the political conflicts of Lancaster and York. In *Romeo and Juliet* the enveloping action is the old feud of Montague and Capulet; in *The Merchant of Venice* the feud of Jew and Christian. In *Cymbeline* we have the war for subjection or independence between Rome and Britain. There is the Florentine war to play a similar part in *All's Well that Ends Well*. In *Lear* we find a war of the rival countries England and France; in *Hamlet* a war of Denmark and Norway; in *Othello* a naval war of Venice with the Turks. To most readers, no doubt, this particular element in the various plays is of little importance, or it is altogether overlooked. But it was otherwise with the poet himself; and those who delight to trace the fine workmanship of the dramatist will see clear evidences of design and contrivance in the way this enveloping action is regularly worked into the design of the plot. A good illustration is the play of *Much Ado about Nothing*. Here the enveloping action is the war between the Prince and his bastard brother: one of those petty faction conflicts with which Italian history is rife, of no interest in itself to readers of the story. Yet Shakespeare takes pains to insinuate this thread of action into the leading points of the movement, letting it just appear at the beginning, the turning point, and the end. The defeat of Don John makes the opening situation, by which the personages are drawn together to exert influence on one another: it is the

return from the war which brings Claudio to indulge his love for Hero, Benedick to tease and be teased by Beatrice, Don John himself in sullen submission to look around for opportunities of mischief.[1] When the villanous design against Hero's honour, which is the foundation of the plot, has been unexpectedly discovered, Don John is compelled to flee, and the rebellion which makes the enveloping action is reinstated.[2] And when this sad complication has at last attained complete and happy resolution, though the reader has forgotten all about Don John and civil war, yet Shakespeare devotes a few final lines to arrival of news that the rebel has once more been defeated, and the enveloping action has thus come to a close.[3] Another example is *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*. The matter of the play is the gossamer substance of fairy life, with arbitrary accidents of love as fanciful as the title of the poem suggests. Yet all this is enclosed in the substantial framework of public life and state ceremonial, an enveloping action of the Marriage of Theseus and Hippolyta, which connects itself with every thread of the design. For this public function the youths of Athens have prepared their farcical tragedy; Oberon and Titania have come from infinite distance for this precise occasion; their mutual jealousy is jealousy of the royal bride and bridegroom, their renewed amity will crown the wedding day with midnight fairy dance; when in the morning light the human lovers awake from their tangled experience, their strange situation is by the King and his bride put down to connection with the wedding ceremonies and sports:

> No doubt they rose up early to observe
> The rite of May; and, hearing our intent,
> Came here in grace of our solemnity.[4]

The amount of motive influence exerted by the enveloping action upon the rest of the movement is substantial, although

[1] *Much Ado* I. i, iii. [2] Compare V. ii. 63. [3] V. iv. 127.
[4] *Midsummer-Night's Dream* I. ii; II. i. 69–76; IV. i. 92; IV. i. 129.

the influence is indirect. In *Richard the Third*, not only is the matter of the play part of the Wars of the Roses, but Richard himself, and the lesser personages, are a creation of those faction fights, and are inspired by the passions of the wars. The feud of Montague and Capulet has determined the peculiar type of love for the play — the love that is binding together born enemies; the feud makes all the difficulties for this course of true love, and turns it finally into a terrible tragedy. Persecution of Jews by Christians not only accounts for much in the character of Shylock, but even determines largely the action of Antonio and other Christians. In *Cymbeline*, the war has the effect of drawing together the personages of the play as the movement progresses; it is this which brings Posthumus and Iachimo from Italy back to Britain; it draws Imogen into the Roman host and the meeting with her husband; it attracts the royal boys and their foster-father into the conflict in which their fresh valour is to reverse the current of events. Notably in *Lear* the French war draws all the several personages to a meeting point which makes a crisis. In *Hamlet*, the first thought of those who see the Ghost in armour is of the warlike preparations going on around them; our first sight of the hero at court is in connection with an embassy which diverts the threatened war into another channel; the casual passage of troops later in the play rouses Hamlet to the task in which he has been flagging; when the catastrophe has exhausted the royal house of Denmark, Hamlet with dying breath recognises the claims to succession of Fortinbras, who is just returning in triumph from the war. An interesting case is the play of *Love's Labour's Lost*. Here the enveloping action is a political negotiation: it appears only at two points. The arrival of the French princess and her suite to conduct this negotiation brings a force of young and healthy life to confound the solemn plans of Navarre: humour dissolves solemnity, and all gradually works out to a complete dramatic finish. But then a turn comes in the enveloping action — the death of the French King whom the embassy rep-

resents.[1] At once a serious tone is thrown over the comic dénouement; the love that has been made in jest is concluded in earnest.

'The sway of circumstances:' this expression, I think, conveys that element of life to which the enveloping action of dramatic plot corresponds. Just as the moon, with unseen agency and at infinite distance, draws the tides of the sea its own way; just as the swing of Earth on its axis, that no attentive discrimination can detect, yet carries mankind through its phases of day and night: so the enveloping history, remote as it may be from individual interest of story, becomes a force to mould and sway the story's course. The sway then of circumstance, and the momentum of character, make the dramatic counterparts to the two most obvious limitations of individual will — environment and heredity.

It may be added, that in certain cases it is the larger life of the state and community which the drama brings into prominence, while individual action with its story interest falls into a subordinate place. But this differentiates a special dramatic type; side by side with tragedy and comedy, Shakespeare has given us the history, as the play in which the enveloping action is predominant over all the rest of the plot.

[1] *Love's Labour's Lost* V. ii, from 725.

XIII

THE PENDULUM OF HISTORY

Our survey of the Shakespearean world has reached the point where, as dramatised in the enveloping action, we have seen history enfolding story, the larger life of the state or nation touching, yet lying outside, the narrower life of personality. Between the two things thus brought together there is one obvious difference. Story must, in the nature of things, be complete; unless the course of individual action has run its full round, so that nemesis, pathos, or similar principles are caught, there is no story. On the contrary, the history that makes an enveloping action is fragmentary; it is but a small arc of a circle extending beyond the field of view. Even in the special type of dramas called histories, where the enveloping action predominates over all the rest of the plot, the limits of a single drama are too strait to comprehend the large unity that belongs to history; other forms of dramatic interest obtain here, such as the notoriety of the incidents presented, and their appeal to the instinct of patriotism. But the question naturally presents itself: If a larger arc of the circle were presented, if a sufficiently wide range of national life could be dramatically treated, then might not history catch the completeness of story, and great historic principles be seen to emerge?

It is obvious that there are good materials for the consideration of this question in the plays of Shakespeare which treat the history of England. They are ten in number; eight of the ten are continuous, or at least named after successive reigns; the other two are indeed separated from the continuous succession, but in a way which naturally invites the suggestion so often made, that they constitute a prologue and an epilogue to the double tetralogy.

We are deterred, it is true, from expecting much in the way of sustained plan by the mode in which the plays were produced; the later tetralogy was composed before the earlier; moreover, in the three parts of *Henry the Sixth* indications of collaboration, and the working over of other materials, are specially clear. But here, as always, the question is not of an author and a conscious plan. These dramas stage English history, as other plays stage romance stories. The real question is, whether the conception of history betrayed in this succession of plays is resolvable into anything that can be called law or principle.

To me it appears that we must answer this question in the affirmative. A certain principle of history, simple yet highly impressive, appears dramatically enunciated in the prologue play, worked over on the largest scale in the succession of eight historic dramas, and recast with a striking variation in the play which serves as epilogue. The principle is best expressed in metaphorical language: it is the pendulum swing of events between one and the other of two rival interests; a deep-seated alternation in the natural course of things. Such a principle needs, however, a corollary. If the general movement is to be a pendulum-like alternation, this will be the more impressive dramatically if it is broken at intervals by what appears like a position of rest: not rest in the negative sense, — as if the alternation at that point was merely not perceptible, — but a peculiar, striking, exceptional evenness between things which before and after are seen rising and falling. Or it may be that there is a pause to gather in fresh material, which is itself presently to become the subject of rapid mutation. This then is the nature of the movement I am seeking in this chapter to trace through the succession of historic plays; a persistent swing in the course of history to and fro, broken by parentheses of emphasised rest, or other preparation for fresh alternation.

It is the play of *King John* which serves as prologue for the historic succession. Here we have very clearly marked the two

interests between which the movement of the plot is to alternate. England and France are throughout Shakespeare treated as rival countries; the rivalry in the present case is enhanced by a double claim to the English crown; France has backed the cause of young Arthur, while John has his claim supported by the strong argument of possession. Yet other forces are added to both sides, to make the scale more even. Feminine influence is strong for either cause; the passionate young motherhood of Constance is a bulwark for Arthur; the queen mother Elinor brings to John the strength of maturity and political capacity. Again, France has an ally, the Duke of Austria, who appears always in his robe of lion's skin, in token of the proud feat by which he held prisoner the magnificent Cœur-de-lion; naturally he is the enemy of the King who is his prisoner's brother. On the other hand the English army contains Faulconbridge, bastard son of this Cœur-de-lion, whose rude humour loses no opportunity of mocking the lion-like pretensions of Austria, while his rough valour eventually brings the boaster to his doom. Between these evenly balanced interests — England with its allies, France with its allies — the pendulum of fortune is to be seen swinging.[1]

But, as we have seen, the alternation will be the more dramatically impressive if the movement can start in some evenness of poise between the interests that are afterwards to rise and fall. This is secured by the curious incident of Angiers, which occupies the second act of the play. This Angiers is a fortified city in that part of the land of France which at the period of the play was an appanage of the English crown. The French King has begun the war against John by besieging this place; his ally and the French court are with him in the field. And it is here that King John, with his court and his army of invasion, encounters his rival. First, there is a discussion of rights and claims between the two courts, feminine bitterness and rough humour bearing

[1] For dividing points and exact references compare the scheme of *King John* in the Appendix below, page 365.

their part in the dialogue. Words proving vain, both armies turn to force, and the city is summoned with blast of trumpet.

First Cit. Who is it that hath warn'd us to the walls?
King Philip. 'Tis France, for England.
King John. England, for itself.
You men of Angiers, and my loving subjects, —
King Philip. You loving men of Angiers, Arthur's subjects,
Our trumpet call'd you to this gentle parle, —
King John. For our advantage; therefore hear us first.

Oratory follows from both kings, but the good burghers have a plain answer.

First Cit. In brief, we are the King of England's subjects;
For him, and in his right, we hold this town.
King John. Acknowledge then the king, and let me in.
First Cit. That can we not; but he that proves the king,
To him will we prove loyal: till that time
Have we ramm'd up our gates against the world.

The citizens of Angiers have exactly anticipated the spirit of the future Jacobite toast:

> God bless the King; God bless our faith's defender;
> God bless — no harm in blessing — the Pretender:
> But who Pretender is, and who is King,
> God bless us all, that's quite another thing.

There is nothing to be done except that the two parties determine their claims by force. With the stage symbol of alarums and excursions a battle is indicated, and then summons is renewed: the French herald declaring that victory plays upon the dancing banners of the French; his rival of England proclaiming with equal confidence King John commander of this hot malicious day. But the burghers have been watching from the walls, and know the facts.

> Blood hath bought blood and blows have answer'd blows;
> Strength match'd with strength, and power confronted power:
> Both are alike; and both alike we like.

> One must prove greatest: while they weigh so even,
> We hold our town for neither, yet for both.

Nothing could emphasise more dramatically the even poise of the scales in which England and France are being weighed than the possibility of a single city thus defying three potentates and their armies. Faulconbridge catches the situation, and asks why the rival kings let "these scroyles of Angiers" flout them, and why they do not unite their forces to level the insolent fort to the ground, and afterwards fight out their own quarrel. The counsel suits the spirit of the times; there is a movement for carrying it into effect, when the citizens feel the peril of their position, and meet the crisis with a proposal of their own. In parley with the kings they point to two youthful figures in the rival courts, the French Dauphin, and Blanch, niece of the English King.

> He is the half part of a blessed man,
> Left to be finished by such as she;
> And she a fair divided excellence,
> Whose fulness of perfection lies in him.

In pompous oratory it is suggested that a union of these two persons would heal the breach between two kingdoms, and be more powerful than cannon to open the fortress gates. The policy of such a match attracts the elders; youth and beauty work upon the parties concerned; the project gains ground, and articles of treaty are discussed. The evenly balanced conflict has ended in compromise, Faulconbridge alone catching the humour of the situation: that King John to bar a title to the whole has voluntarily surrendered a part, while the champion of conscience has exchanged a holy war for a vile peace, all through that great bias of the world — Commodity!

Now it is precisely with this proposal from the men of Angiers that the peculiar movement of the play has started from its position of rest. Up to this point, all has gone to emphasise the even balance of the two parties; when this compromise has been accepted, we have the whole power of England, of France, of

Austria, concentrated on one side, while on the other side young Arthur is left helpless and alone. It is in vain that they talk to Constance of the blessedness of peace, and declare that the day which has brought it shall be a perpetual holiday.

Constance. A wicked day, and not a holy day!
What hath this day deserved? What hath it done,
That it in golden letters should be set
Among the high tides in the calendar?
Nay, rather turn this day out of the week,
This day of shame, oppression, perjury.
Or, if it must stand still, let wives with child
Pray that their burthens may not fall this day,
Lest that their hopes prodigiously be cross'd;
But on this day let seamen fear no wreck;
No bargains break that are not this day made:
This day, all things begun come to ill end,
Yea, faith itself to hollow falsehood change!

The passion of Constance is the precise measure of the degree to which the pendulum of fortune has swung to the side opposed to Arthur. Yet it is in the midst of this scene of bitterness between Arthur's mother and her former allies that a diversion takes place, and, in reality, the sway of movement has begun to turn in an opposite direction.

The diversion has been made by the entrance of the papal legate: on his way to England he has met its king in company with the King of France. In presence of the two monarchs and their courts the legate blurts out certain demands respecting quarrels between the English crown and primate. John is represented in this drama as the mouthpiece of England's antagonism to papal pretensions.

John. What earthly name to interrogatories
Can task the free breath of a sacred king?

When Philip is shocked at resistance to Holy Church, John speaks with more and more of defiance, until the legate thunders excom-

munication, and King Philip is commanded to loose the hand of an arch-heretic. It had happened that the papal legate entered at the very moment in which the two kings by a ceremonious hand-clasp were signifying their new peace and alliance : round that hand-clasp a great contest now wages — Pandulph against John, Constance against Elinor, Austria against Faulconbridge ; the newly pledged lover and his prospective bride take opposite sides. Arguments as to the sacredness of peace and treaty faith seem vain.

Pandulph. All form is formless, order orderless,
Save what is opposite to England's love.

The conflict extends to the very verge of excommunication against Philip : only then does he yield.

Pandulph. I will denounce a curse upon his head.
King Philip. Thou shalt not need. England, I will fall from thee.
Constance. O fair return of banish'd majesty!
Elinor. O foul revolt of French inconstancy!

The loosing of this hand-clasp has symbolised a swing of the pendulum from one extreme to the very opposite : a moment before Arthur was alone, and all power massed on the side of John ; by this change we see the whole strength of France and Austria transferred to the support of Arthur, with the addition of the spiritual power of Rome and Holy Church, while John must face this vast combination without a single ally.

There is another turning-point, and the pendulum swings back. This time it is by 'the fortune of war' : providence is not always on the side of the big battalions, and, though France, Austria, and Rome are all against England, in the actual fight it is England that wins. A roaring tempest shatters the French fleet ; their armies are disgracefully defeated in the field ; the Duke of Austria is slain in battle by Faulconbridge. This Faulconbridge, as a man not likely to be frightened by bell, book, and candle, is sent to England to seize the wealth of the Church. —

> Ere our coming, see thou shake the bags
> Of hoarding abbots; imprisoned angels
> Set at liberty: the fat ribs of peace
> Must by the hungry now be fed upon.

More than all this: little Arthur is taken prisoner by John, and given into the sure custody of Hubert. Reversal of fortune could not be more complete: Constance appears before us —

> a grave unto a soul;
> Holding the eternal spirit, against her will,
> In the vile prison of afflicted breath.

Even the Dauphin of France finds life not worth living:

> Life is as tedious as a twice-told tale
> Vexing the dull ear of a drowsy man.

Now, it is just at the close of this speech of the Dauphin that one more turning-point of the plot must be placed; the pendulum of events prepares to swing again from one extreme to the opposite. This time the change comes through that hidden force in things we call 'reaction': the sagacious legate sees how the very completeness of John's good fortune will make him reckless and unscrupulous; something will happen to Arthur, there will be a revulsion of feeling in England against the evil King, and the French prince may claim the crown by virtue of his marriage with Lady Blanch. And events turn out precisely as Pandulph prophesies. The fourth act is filled with dramatic interest of detail, especially with reference to the character of Hubert as a man of mystery, who plays a deeper part than appears on the surface. But the drift of this act in the general plot is to present Arthur dead, the blame of it fixed by the national voice on the King, the French invading in force, and the English nobles — who constitute the military force of the country — deserting in mass to the enemy. John is left helpless, with a hostile people behind him, and in front an enemy already landed on his shores.

An adroit device of a desperate man makes another turning-

point, and introduces one more reversal of the scale of fortune. In flat contradiction to his late position as representative of national independence, King John in this extremity surrenders his crown to Rome, and, at the opening of the fifth act, is seen receiving it back as Rome's vassal. Thus one powerful element of the combination against him is not only removed, but transferred to King John's side.

Pandulph. It was my breath that blew this tempest up,
Upon your stubborn usage of the pope;
But since you are a gentle convertite,
My tongue shall hush again this storm of war,
And make fair weather in your blustering land.

Of course, the invading prince of France resents thus being made a puppet of Roman diplomacy. But meanwhile Faulconbridge, embodying the patriotic spirit which repels invasion under any pretext, has raised a powerful force to confront Lewis. Providence takes the English side, and the French reinforcements are wrecked on the Goodwin sands. More strange still: a dying nobleman of the French army reveals to the English a treacherous plot against the nobles who had deserted to France.

Fly, noble English, you are bought and sold;
Unthread the rude eye of rebellion
And welcome home again discarded faith.
Seek out King John and fall before his feet;
For if the French be lords of this loud day,
He means to recompense the pains you take
By cutting off your heads: thus hath he sworn
And I with him, and many moe with me,
Upon the altar at Saint Edmundsbury;
Even on that altar where we swore to you
Dear amity and everlasting love. . . .
Commend me to one Hubert with your King:
The love of him, and this respect besides,
For that my grandsire was an Englishman,
Awakes my conscience to confess all this.

Thus at this point it is the representative of France who is defeated, deserted, and helpless, and all power has gravitated to the English side.

Yet the course of events dramatised in this play is to see just one more swing of the pendulum. King John, victorious against the French and in the restored allegiance of his nobles, is suddenly conscious that he is doomed never to reap the fruits of victory.

> Poison'd, — ill fare, — dead, forsook, cast off:
> And none of you will bid the winter come
> To thrust his icy fingers in my maw,
> Nor let my kingdom's rivers take their course
> Through my burn'd bosom, nor entreat the north
> To make his bleak winds kiss my parched lips
> And comfort me with cold.

As Faulconbridge enters, the King rallies his strength to hear the news he brings.

> The tackle of my heart is crack'd and burn'd,
> And all the shrouds wherewith my life should sail
> Are turned to one thread, one little hair:
> My heart hath one poor string to stay it by,
> Which holds but till thy news be uttered.

The news Faulconbridge brings is that the forces he was leading to meet fresh advance of the Dauphin have been overpowered by a flood as the Wash was being crossed. At the shock of this loss the King dies, and the pendulum swing of the plot ceases. It only remains for the papal legate to make peace between the countries, and Henry reigns in his father's stead.

To the modern reader Shakespeare's dramatisation of the reign of King John comes as a surprise. There is not a hint of what we are accustomed to consider as the characteristic of that reign, making it the most critical period of English history; on the other hand, what would seem matter of inferior moment is treated with fine workmanship and dramatic vigour. The explanation is easy, if this play is to stand as prologue to the succession of histories, and

if the spirit of history, as conceived by Elizabethan dramatists, consisted in the pendulum-like alternation of fortune. Nowhere else do we find the rival interests so evenly balanced, nor the balance so constantly emphasised; nowhere else do we see such sharp turns in events, and such great mutations realised in such brief intervals. Moreover the whole of this manifold alternation is within the limits of a single play, and centres around the single personality of King John.

It is different as we pass on: we now have a succession of eight dramas making a connected whole; the longer period is fit for the larger life of history. The two interests between which fortune is to alternate remain substantially the same throughout. On the one side we have the crown; on the other side we see, now domestic sedition, now foreign war, until the two elements seem to unite as court factions grow into the fully developed Wars of the Roses. Of course, in the several plays which make up the series there is much beside this main interest of historic action and reaction. In *King John* we have had the characters of Faulconbridge, of Hubert and Arthur; in later plays we have the personalities of a Hotspur and a Glendower; the Falstaff underplot in the two parts of *Henry the Fourth* throws the historic interest into the shade. And further, if we divide the eight plays into two tetralogies, we get (as earlier chapters of this book have pointed out) a rise throughout the three plays of the interest which is to dominate the fourth: a rise of Henry Prince of Wales into the ideal heroism of *Henry the Fifth*, a steady development of Gloucester into the ideal villany that is to be the note of *Richard the Third*. But the link of continuity which binds the eight plays into a whole is this alternation, stretching from play to play, between the royal power and its domestic and foreign foes.

If a position of rest is wanted as a starting-point for a movement of alternation, we find it surely in that strange sentiment of the divine right of kings, which more or less obtains throughout Shakespeare's treatment of English history, but in the play of

Richard the Second stands out in high relief from contrast with the King who represents it. To Richard the sacred authority of the crown seems valuable only as a means of supply for the expensive vices he displays in company with his creatures.

Gaunt. This royal throne of kings, this scepter'd isle,
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
This other Eden, demi-paradise,
This fortress built by Nature for herself
Against infection and the hand of war;
This happy breed of men, this little world,
This precious stone set in the silver sea . . .
Is now leased out, I die pronouncing it,
Like to a tenement or pelting farm.

Frivolity sits upon the throne: none the less gravity bows down in pious submission. From this height of divinely constituted authority the sway of events is seen bringing the royal power down to the depths. The turning-point is dramatically marked.[1] Richard has been delayed in Ireland by contrary winds, all the while that in England rebellion has been gathering head. At last he lands, and fondles with his hand the soil of his kingdom, safe now its rightful ruler has returned.

Not all the water in the rough rude sea
Can wash the balm off from an anointed king;
The breath of worldly men cannot depose
The deputy elected by the Lord:
For every man that Bolingbroke hath press'd
To lift shrewd steel against our golden crown,
God for his Richard hath in heavenly pay
A glorious angel: then, if angels fight,
Weak men must fall, for heaven still guards the right.

From these very words Richard turns to meet the first of a string of messengers bearing news of delay, of dispersion, of death, till further inquiry becomes useless.

[1] For divisions and exact references throughout this chapter, see scheme of the historic plays in the Appendix below, pages 365–369.

Aumerle. Where is the duke my father with his power?
King Richard. No matter where; of comfort no man speak:
Let's talk of graves, of worms and epitaphs;
Make dust our paper and with rainy eyes
Write sorrow on the bosom of the earth.
Let's choose executors and talk of wills:
And yet not so, for what can we bequeath
Save our deposed bodies to the ground?
Our lands, our lives and all are Bolingbroke's,
And nothing can we call our own but death,
And that small model of the barren earth
Which serves as paste and cover to our bones.

This passage stands but at the centre of the play; yet all the rest is no more than the swing downward from exalted kingship to humiliation, deposition, imprisonment, murder; the swing upward of Bolingbroke, who entered England humbly claiming the property of his deceased father, to the throne vacated by Richard.

In the plays treating the reign of Henry the Fourth the historic alternation is seen to have recommenced. The power which hurled Richard from kingship was Bolingbroke in alliance with Northumberland: Bolingbroke's was the rival title to the throne, Northumberland was the influence to bring round the English nobles and lead the revolution. As the first part of *Henry the Fourth* opens we see these firm allies separated: King Bolingbroke has sunk from security to the necessity of meeting factious uprisings in all parts of his dominions, and the link that binds all these rebel factions together is Northumberland. Hotspur, the warrior of the rebellion, is Northumberland's son; his brother Worcester is its statesman; family ties connect the house of Northumberland with Wales, and bring the mighty Welsh magician Glendower to aid the cause; the Percies, moreover, in their period of loyalty, had made conquests in Scotland, and, turning rebels, can by restoring prisoners win Douglas and the Scotch to their side. To so low a point has the royal power declined in contrast with rising rebellion, that the chief concern of the revolting leaders is how they shall divide the country

between themselves. A well-known speech of the King not only recognises Northumberland as the focus of this widespread sedition, but is further important as giving expression, in the midst of the shifting incidents, to the thought of alternating fortunes as the law of national history.[1]

O God! that one might read the book of fate,
And see the revolution of the times
Make mountains level, and the continent,
Weary of solid firmness, melt itself
Into the sea! and, other times, to see
The beachy girdle of the ocean
Too wide for Neptune's hips; how chances mock,
And changes fill the cup of alteration
With divers liquors! O, if this were seen,
The happiest youth, viewing his progress through,
What perils past, what crosses to ensue,
Would shut the book, and sit him down and die.
'Tis not ten years gone
Since Richard and Northumberland, great friends,
Did feast together, and in two years after
Were they at wars: it is but eight years since
This Percy was the man nearest my soul,
Who like a brother toil'd in my affairs
And laid his love and life under my foot,
Yea, for my sake, even to the eyes of Richard
Gave him defiance. But which of you was by —
You, cousin Nevil, as I may remember —
When Richard, with his eye brimful of tears,
Then check'd and rated by Northumberland,
Did speak these words, now proved a prophecy?
'Northumberland, thou ladder by the which
My cousin Bolingbroke ascends my throne;' . . .
'The time shall come,' thus did he follow it,
'The time will come, that foul sin, gathering head,
Shall break into corruption': so went on,
Foretelling this same time's condition,
And the division of our amity.

[1] *II Henry the Fourth:* III. i. 45.

Northumberland is the one link binding the scattered rebellions into a unity of strength: the hesitation and weakness of Northumberland dissolves this unity. Irresistible as a whole, the rebels are defeated piecemeal, and the pendulum of fortune is seen to have moved to the side of royal power. Passage after passage marks the critical position of Northumberland in the plot.[1] Meanwhile, this man upon whom everything depends is exhibited before us in the bosom of his family, distracted by doubts.

Northumberland. 'Tis with my mind
As with the tide swell'd up unto his height,
That makes a still-stand, running neither way:
Fain would I go to meet the archbishop,
But many thousand reasons hold me back.
I will resolve for Scotland.[2]

The temporising policy of Northumberland paralyses his allies; one after another the separated forces of revolt are wiped out, until Westmoreland can say to the King in his palace —

There is not now a rebel's sword unsheath'd.

Fortune has swung to the full height of exaltation for the king; in an instant it swings back again, for the shock of good news brings on apoplexy.

King. And wherefore should these good news make me sick?
Will Fortune never come with both hands full,
But write her fair words still in foulest letters?
She either gives a stomach and no food;
Such are the poor, in health; or else a feast,
And takes away the stomach; such are the rich,
That have abundance and enjoy it not.
I should rejoice now at this happy news;
And now my sight fails, and my brain is giddy:
O me! come near me; now I am much ill.

[1] E.g. *I Henry the Fourth:* II. iii. init.; IV. i. 13–85; IV. iv, from 13; *II Henry the Fourth:* I. i. 163; I. iii, from 10.

[2] *II Henry the Fourth:* II. iii. 62.

From the triumphant scene of his long-delayed success the King is carried to die.

We now reach, in the play of *Henry the Fifth*, one of those breaks in the mutations of fortune, which, we have seen, are an essential feature in the movement of history as conceived by Shakespeare. The starting-point for the oscillation between royal power and sedition was found in the divinity of kingship: the presentation of a kingly personality makes a central stage of rest. A former chapter of this book has dwelt upon the way in which Shakespeare reads into the character of Henry of Monmouth a combination of all elements making supreme heroism; under heroic rule like this resistance to royal power appears only to display its own weakness. Before this we have seen sedition taking local colour from all parts of the king's dominions: we have had Glendower and Welsh, Douglas and Scotch, the Percies and English revolt; in *King John* we have heard of rebels in Ireland. But it is a distinctive note in the French war of *Henry the Fifth* that all the component elements of Great Britain are represented; one line of action in the underplot is made by English officers and men led by Gower, Welsh officers led by Fluellen, Scotch by Jamy, Irish by MacMorris, all blending together into a pageant of military life.

We pass on, and the swing of fortune is resumed, and maintained through the three parts of *Henry the Sixth*. Rest is still used as a contrast to motion, but in a different way; instead of intervals of repose, making breathing spaces in a long-sustained movement of alternation, we here have the element of rest maintained continuously as a background, against which the rising and falling vicissitudes stand out in relief. This element of repose is the King himself. We have had divinity of kingship and kingly personality: in the present case we have unkingly kingship. The spirit of Henry is the devout ideal of the quiet cloister, ever in antagonism with the turmoil of public life. In a lonely spot adjoining a battlefield of civil war, on which son is killing father and father son, Henry meditates.[1] —

[1] *III Henry the Sixth:* II. v. 20.

O God ! methinks it were a happy life,
To be no better than a homely swain;
To sit upon a hill, as I do now,
To carve out dials quaintly, point by point,
Thereby to see the minutes how they run,
How many make the hour full complete;
How many hours bring about the day;
How many days will finish up the year;
How many years a mortal man may live.
When this is known, then to divide the times:
So many hours must I tend my flock;
So many hours must I take my rest;
So many hours must I contemplate;
So many hours must I sport myself;
So many days my ewes have been with young;
So many days ere the poor fools will ean;
So many years ere I shall shear the fleece:
So minutes, hours, days, months, and years,
Pass'd over to the end they were created,
Would bring white hairs unto a quiet grave.

The personality of Henry is before us through three plays, symbol of this reposeful ideal: meanwhile, those who rule in his name, but not in his spirit, are giving scope for the ceaseless mutations of fortune.

The first play opens with the French war: if we read continuously the scenes portraying this war we may almost mark the margin of the book with the crescendo and decrescendo of musical score, so regularly and rapidly does the pendulum swing between English success and failure. The funeral of Henry the Fifth is disturbed by messengers following on one another's heels with tidings of ill: Guienne, Champagne, Rheims, Orleans, Paris, all lost; the Dauphin crowned in Rheims, the Bastard of Orleans, the Dukes of Anjou and Alençon supporting his cause; and worse still, the stout Talbot treacherously deserted and taken prisoner. As the scene shifts to the seat of war the worst for England seems realised: Charles and his French lords feel that one more effort will raise the siege of Orleans.—

> Remaineth none but mad-brain'd Salisbury;
> And he may well in fretting spend his gall,
> Nor men nor money hath he to make war.

The battle is essayed, and at once the sway of fortune has changed in favour of England: the Dauphin is in full retreat, cursing his dastard soldiers, while Salisbury now is called a desperate homicide fighting as if weary of life; the French say the English army is made up of Samsons and Goliases, that —

> Their arms are set like clocks, still to strike on.

But immediately fortune turns again: the hopes of the enemy rise as news comes of the Holy Maid, raised up by miraculous vision to drive the English from France. La Pucelle appears, easily foils the simple devices tried to test her; and French victory is felt to be assured.

> Glory is like a circle in the water,
> Which never ceaseth to enlarge itself
> Till by broad spreading it disperse to nought.
> With Henry's death the English circle ends;
> Dispersed are the glories it included.

But, to balance this, the English side receives a most valuable accession: in the trenches round Orleans, Salisbury welcomes Talbot, ransomed from captivity after innumerable adventures. As the tale of adventure is being told, fickle fortune is veering: a gun carefully trained to cover the turret where the two warriors are speaking is touched at the right moment by the gunner's boy, and — woe for England! — the noble Salisbury is shattered to pieces. There is a cry that La Pucelle is approaching: the turns of fate are quick: in the valiant agony of witnessing the fall of Salisbury, Talbot drives the Dauphin and his French forces in headlong flight; in another moment it is Talbot who is driven before the French Maid, the old warrior bursting with spleen, giddy with whirling thoughts, as his forces give ground before a woman; all is vain, the French colours wave on the walls of

Orleans. Night settles down on the French rejoicings, to quench them in humiliation. The English regent and his ally of Burgundy approach with scaling ladders; the cry of 'St. George' and 'a Talbot' is heard, and the French "leap over the walls in their shirts"; as the French leaders stand half dressed, with bundles of clothes under their arms, mixing mutual recriminations with plans of rallying, a single unseen Englishman raises the cry of 'Talbot,' and scatters them in flight, their clothes left behind as spoils for the humorous soldier. Another turn of Fortune; this time the fickle dame wears the guise of courtesy. English hopes seem to decline as the irresistible Talbot is enticed into the castle of the Countess of Auvergne, on a pretext of hospitable admiration; the admiration is dropped as soon as her porter enters with the keys of the castle, and the hostess taunts Talbot with being her prisoner.

> Long time thy shadow had been thrall to me,
> For in my gallery thy picture hangs:
> But now the substance shall endure the like,
> And I will chain these legs and arms of thine.

The hopes of England have risen again as we hear the ringing laugh of the great prisoner.

> No, no, I am but shadow of myself:
> You are deceived, my substance is not here;
> For what you see is but the smallest part
> And least proportion of humanity:
> I tell you, madam, were the whole frame here,
> It is of such a spacious lofty pitch,
> Your roof were not sufficient to contain 't.

Talbot winds his horn, and from outside is heard the drum and thunder of artillery: the captor is at the captive's mercy. With the scene shifted to Rouen, the alternation of fate goes on. The English lose Rouen, deceived by La Pucelle's picturesque stratagem of warriors disguised as market men with their sacks; the English recover Rouen the same day, with the more than picturesque incident of the regent Bedford, at point of death, remaining

on the scene in his chair, until English victory gives him leisure to die. One more mutation, in favour of France: policy is tried where force has failed, and, as the English forces march along in full strength, their indispensable ally of Burgundy is detached, and subjected to the inspired eloquence of the Holy Maid. He is bewitched, relents, is vanquished, will sever himself from Talbot, and transfer his force to the opposite scale: the third act ends with the swing of the pendulum wholly to the side of English loss.

The fourth act is a parenthesis in the general movement of alternation. The present play has for its main interest the French war, the play which follows, English sedition: these are respectively the fields in which the pendulum of movement manifests itself. This fourth act has the function of linking these two things, war and sedition, into one. Single scenes scattered through the series of war pictures have displayed the factious rivalry among the English nobles — Gloucester against Winchester, white rose of York against red rose of Lancaster. In the fourth act the boy King, in vain effort of reconciliation, takes the unfortunate step of himself putting on the red rose of Somerset, while he appoints the rival Duke of York regent of France, with Somerset to support him. The consequences may be foreseen. Talbot in desperate straits at Bourdeaux appeals for succour: York lingers to lay the blame on Somerset, Somerset on York. What help is secured comes too late: the siege of Bourdeaux becomes the piteous tragedy of the two Talbots, aged father and young son, clasped together in the arms of death.

It remains for the fifth act to present, most dramatically, the final alternation of fortune in the war between England and France. The scene has shifted to Angiers; outside its walls battle is raging, and it seems to be in favour of England. The Holy Maid betakes herself to her magic.

> Now help, ye charming spells and periapts;
> And ye choice spirits that admonish me,
> And give me signs of future accidents.

Fiends appear. She makes her appeal: they walk and speak not. She offers to lop off a member of her body: they hang their heads. She offers her body itself in payment of their aid: they shake their heads. Then she bids them take her soul, if only the French may foil the English: the Fiends vanish, and La Pucelle gives up hope. She is soon taken prisoner, and the fortunes of England have risen above the power of sorcery and miracle. But in the very same battle another woman is taken prisoner by the English; the seeming success in reality is fraught with ruin. The prisoner is the Princess Margaret of Anjou, whose beauty casts upon her captor Suffolk a spell that wrecks his life; the princess is reserved as queen for Henry, but — by strange reversal of marriage customs — a price is to be paid for her: the price is nothing less than the counties of Anjou and Maine, keys of Normandy. It is a bargain of infatuation: grizzled warriors weep that the dominion of England in France is irretrievably lost.

In the second part of *King Henry the Sixth* sedition makes the matter of the plot: in the alternate triumphs of hostile factions the regular historic movement is to be recognised. Margaret has become a force in England; Suffolk and Winchester support her, while others rally around the good Gloucester, protector of the realm. At first the sway of fate is all in favour of the Queen and her party. Gloucester is struck at through his wife; the duchess is insulted at court, and is caught by spies in secret séances of magic. Gloucester is relieved of his protectorate, and accusations are pressed against the retiring official. He is committed to the custody of his enemies; they are led on by factious hate to contrive murder. In an instant the pendulum swings back: through a series of picturesque incidents we have the wave of revulsion spreading high and low. Winchester dies in impenitent frenzy, raving of poison and murder. The King shudders at the tight of his lovely Queen, and, strengthened by the riots of the indignant commons, banishes Suffolk; in his banishment he is taken by pirates, and recognised. —

Whitmore. The Duke of Suffolk, muffled up in rags!
Suffolk. Ay, but these rags are no part of the duke: Jove sometime went disguised, and why not I?
Captain. But Jove was never slain, as thou shalt be.

Sedition again appears; but its form is entirely changed — it is the grotesque popular rising of Jack Cade, half rude fun, half reckless bloodshed. Its leaders are Dick Butcher, Smith the Weaver, a Sawyer, a Tanner; its charter —

> There shall be in England seven halfpenny loaves sold for a penny; the three-hooped pot shall have ten hoops; and I will make it felony to drink small beer: all the realm shall be in common.

But the flood of rascality is irresistible in its flow: ordinary forces of the king, noble warriors, are in turn overwhelmed; the tide has reached Blackheath, Southwark, London Bridge, Cannon Street, Smithfield. Even the proud Buckingham and Clifford have to approach the rebels as ambassadors from the King. But this is the sudden turn of the tide: as the ambassadors harangue and Cade answers, the mob shout alternately for King and for Cade.

> *Cade.* Was ever feather so lightly blown to and fro as this multitude? . . . I see them lay their heads together to surprise me. . . . My sword make way for me, for here is no staying.

The tide of sedition has ebbed, the mob has soon vanished, and Jack Cade's head is presently brought in triumph to the King.

The fifth act makes a point of transition to that which is to be the final phase of all this dramatised history, and the new region in which the oscillations of fortune are to be traced. It merely brings to a climax what has run as a side issue through the two dramas, — the rising claims of the House of York. At first[1] it was but a heated dispute of noble friends in the Temple-garden;

[1] *I Henry the Sixth:* II. iv.

plain Richard Plantagenet has insisted, against Somerset, upon a point of family honour.

Plantagenet. Since you are tongue-tied and so loath to speak,
In dumb significants proclaim your thoughts:
Let him that is a true-born gentleman,
And stands upon the honour of his birth,
If he suppose that I have pleaded truth,
From off this brier pluck a white rose with me.

Somerset. Let him that is no coward nor no flatterer,
But dare maintain the party of the truth,
Pluck a red rose from off this thorn with me.

At the end of this famous scene Warwick makes prophecy:

Warwick. This brawl to-day,
Grown to this faction in the Temple-garden,
Shall send between the red rose and the white
A thousand souls to death and deadly night.

So far the question is only whether Richard Plantagenet is tainted by his father's treason; in the next scene,[1] conference with the dying Mortimer stretches the claim, not to a dukedom of York, but to the throne of England. As a next step,[2] both the main factions agree in a bill for restoring Richard Plantagenet, and the King creates him Duke of York. In the second play, his secret ambitions become public property: an armourer is accused by his apprentice of saying that York is rightful heir to the throne; York may indignantly denounce the traitor, but henceforth he is a marked man.[3] He is forced forward in his ambition, gathers friends round him, and to these unfolds his claim, winning powerful support.[4] His foes, upon an outbreak of rebellion in Ireland, combine to send York into safe obscurity on pretext of service against the rebels.[5] York sees his chance. —

[1] *I Henry the Sixth:* II. v.
[2] *I Henry the Sixth:* III. i, from 149.
[3] *II Henry the Sixth:* I. iii. 30, 180–225.
[4] *II Henry the Sixth:* II. ii.
[5] *II Henry the Sixth:* III. i, from 282.

> 'Twas men I lack'd, and you will give them me:
> I take it kindly; yet be well assured
> You put sharp weapons in a madman's hands.

York returns from Ireland with an army at his back; he gradually throws off the disguise, and puts forward pretensions to the crown.[1] There is a fresh precipitation of factious England into new combinations; the battle of St. Alban's is a trial of strength, and York at least holds his own. Thus we pass to the new phase of our history; it is no more a case of sedition, but of armies and the battlefield; the pendulum of fortune is to sway between York and Lancaster in the campaigns that make up the Wars of the Roses.

At the outset[2] the White Rose is seen in the ascendant: the Yorkists have seized the palace, and King Henry, to save his very Parliament house from being a shambles, weakly makes compromise, granting the succession to his rival if his own reign may be undisturbed. Revulsion of feeling against a father who thus disinherits his son throws moral force to the side of the Lancastrian queen; the Red Rose is victorious at Wakefield; the Duke of York is taken prisoner, is mocked with a paper crown, while the inhuman Margaret flourishes in his face a napkin dyed with the blood of the tender son of York, whom Clifford has just assassinated. Fate, as if in horror of such bloodthirsty passion, swings to the other side: Towton field knows many mutations, but in the end the Lancastrians are routed, butcher Clifford has fallen and his corpse is mocked by the foe; finally King Henry is passively taken prisoner by two foresters, who, for all their simplicity, weigh more in the scales of war than the peaceful King. When the Duke of York is seated triumphantly on the throne with the Lancastrian rivals in exile, prosperity makes him wanton: he insists upon a mésalliance which insults his party, his own brother Clarence, and Warwick the main bulwark of his power, passing over to the enemy; the downward sway of Yorkist fortune con-

[1] *II Henry the Sixth*, from V. i.

[2] For references see scheme in Appendix, below, pages 368–369.

tinues into the war which breaks out anew, and its first incident is an inglorious surprise of Edward's camp, the King being captured in his gown. The oscillations of fate now become more rapid. Almost immediately the star of York is in the ascendant; what surprise lately did stratagem now undoes; and King Edward escapes, carrying his warder with him. Again: the action displays a happy hour for the Lancastrians; their King is seen released from captivity, making Clarence and Warwick the agents of his rule. In another moment we have King Henry recaptured in his palace; the flowing tide is with the Yorkists, and in rapid succession we have the double desertion of Clarence, the death of Warwick, the fatal battles of Barnet and Tewkesbury, the assassination of the Prince of Wales and of the King.

When we pass to the play entitled *Richard the Third*, the Wars of the Roses seem to be over; the truth is rather that they have reached their climax — the natural climax of the victors falling out over the spoils. The pendulum movement traced through so many plays also attains its climax: the dramatic counterpoint doubles, and two distinct alternations are perceptible side by side. For one, the whole play in its main plot is but a single swing of the pendulum; it is the Rise and Fall of Richard; villany irresistible strangely elevates Gloucester to a giddy height, and no less mysteriously irresistible nemesis drags him down. While the rise of Richard is in progress, the underplot (as we have seen in a former chapter)[1] is made by the alternate rise and fall of individuals composing the faction of York — Clarence, the Queen's kindred, Hastings, Buckingham: whoever triumphs over the last becomes the victim of the next. And the protracted fall of Richard (we have seen) takes the form of tantalising fluctuations of hope and despair, as messages pour in from a distance, or delusive victory mocks him in the battle itself. That no mode of emphasis may be wanting, the passion of the play catches the rhythm of alternation: Margaret's curses and Richard's retort unify at the last moment the whole war of factions, York made the nemesis upon

[1] Above, pages 41–42.

Lancaster, and Lancaster upon York, from generation to generation. Only with the death of Richard does the long drawn movement reach a position of rest:

> Now civil wars are stopp'd; peace lives again.

The continuous succession of plays is exhausted; but there still remains the drama of *Henry the Eighth*, which criticism loves to call the epilogue to Shakespeare's dramatic history of England. The suggestion is interesting, for the first note struck by the prologue to this play is mutation of fortune; we are bidden to look upon grand personages of history in their pomp and pride, and then see —

> How soon this mightiness meets misery.

Moreover, as we have seen in our discussion of the drama, what there is in it of history takes the form of rise and fall; successive stages in the rise of the young beauty, and successive stages in the fall of the older wife who must make way for her. But we also saw that there was another element of interest in *Henry the Eighth*, different from this. The larger life of history in this drama mingles with the more confined life of personality. Four personages were made prominent — Buckingham, Katherine, Wolsey, Cranmer: these were not treated — like John, Queen Margaret, Warwick, Clifford, and the like — from the outside only, as so many pieces on the chess-board of history. The inner life of individuality was, for these four personages, fully displayed; we were able to see how that which is a fall in the life without may be a rise in the life within, how external elevation may be spiritual poverty. The outer life of each individual is part of the pageant of history; whether he be small or great, his external career may be swung into currents for which he is not responsible, yet which he cannot resist. But whoever has awakened to a consciousness of a life within has a realm of his own outside the sway of history; for the determination of individual character the individual himself is solely responsible.

The pendulum swing of events, the ceaseless oscillation of fortune, the alternate rise and fall of the scales in which issues are weighed, this — with shadowings of rest for relief or contrast — is the law of history, as history is dramatised in Shakespeare. Like the colour of the atmosphere — invisible in the air around us, showing deep blue as we gaze into the depths of space — this pendulum of events is only traceable on the vast scale of national history, in which the minutes and hours are reigns and dynasties. It is an intelligible principle; so much of natural history takes the form of action and reaction, that it need not seem strange if temporal history, seen in extenso, should have ebbs and flows of its tide. The conception of alternate rise and fall of human institutions seems in close harmony with the scheme of providential government that was 'wisdom' to the Hebrew psalmist:

He turneth rivers into a wilderness,
And water springs into a thirsty ground;
A fruitful land into a salt desert,
For the wickedness of them that dwell therein.

He turneth a wilderness into a pool of water,
And a dry land into water springs.
And there he maketh the hungry to dwell,
That they may prepare a city of habitation;
And sow fields, and plant vineyards,
And get them fruits of increase.
He blesseth them also, so that they are multiplied greatly;
And he suffereth not their cattle to decrease.

Again, they are minished and bowed down
Through oppression, trouble, and sorrow,
He poureth contempt upon princes,
And causeth them to wander in the waste, where there is no way.

Yet setteth he the needy on high from affliction,
And maketh him families like a flock.
The upright shall see it, and be glad;
And all iniquity shall stop her mouth.

As it appears in Shakespeare, this sway of history is wholly free from suggestion of fatalism. Throughout the ten plays there has been no hint of malicious destiny mocking strenuous endeavour, such as Greek tragedy delighted to display; there has been no unnatural interference with the consequences of acts. And the epilogue play comes to make impressive the distinction of story and history: it is but the outer life, entangled with the lives of others, on which the swing of historic movement can exercise even the slightest impulse; the life of inner personality is entirely our own.

XIV

SUPERNATURAL AGENCY IN THE MORAL WORLD OF SHAKESPEARE

In our survey of the forces of life we commenced with what is nearest to us, individual will. We then saw how Shakespearean drama indicates the limitations on personal will; from within, in heredity and character; from without, in the sway of immediately surrounding circumstance. In the preceding chapter we went still further afield, and noted how the vast movements of history, only perceptible when time is surveyed on a large scale, constitute a force, to which individual will may yield or rise superior. In this chapter we have to go beyond the bounds of that ordinary course of things we call Nature, and inquire as to the Supernatural, how far it is one of the forces of life in Shakespearean drama. I do not here speak of God, nor of the system of law or providence in which his action may be manifested. The question is of supernatural agencies: how the system of Shakespeare is related to the varied powers, familiar in human tradition, which come between the ordinary course of Nature, and the supreme force of Deity.

It is obvious that from the present point of view two plays of Shakespeare stand apart from all the rest, and form a class by themselves. In *A Midsummer-Night's Dream* and in *The Tempest*, the whole action is permeated by the supernatural. But it is clear that these two dramas are in no way pictures of real life; they are dramatisations of the supernatural. Fairy existence in the one, magic and enchantment in the other, are the hypotheses on which the whole story rests. It does not follow that much may not be learned from these plays with reference to the moral system of Shakespeare; but they have no bearing upon the question im-

mediately before us — the position of supernatural agency in real life.

In the other plays free use seems to be made of what in ordinary parlance is called the supernatural. In *Cymbeline* gods and goddesses of classical antiquity descend upon the scene. The oracle, which was so important in classical drama, makes a pivotal point for *Winter's Tale*, and has a subordinate place in *Cymbeline;* although in both these poems the local colour is modern rather than ancient. Soothsayers, and innumerable forms of omen, such as in antiquity went hand in hand with oracles, are used to a considerable extent in Shakespeare's Roman plays; and similar devices[1] appear in some of the plays of English history. Fiends make an appearance in the first part of *Henry the Sixth* in connection with the sorcery of La Pucelle; in *Henry the Eighth* we have a vision of angels. Witches, and the apparitions their spells can raise, play a prominent part in the tragedy of *Macbeth*. And ghosts seem to have an important share in the action of the dramas of *Hamlet, Julius Cæsar, Macbeth, Richard the Third.*

An attempt is often made to get rid of this apparently supernatural element in Shakespeare's plays by rationalising it out of all real existence; the ghosts and omens (it is said) are but hallucinations of those who see or hear them; Macbeth's witches are but a stage symbol for the spirit of temptation. Such suggestions usually come from criticism that has never frankly accepted inductive examination of the literature as the sole ground of the discussion; and the rationalising proposal is dictated by a desire to bring Shakespeare into harmony with our own more advanced age, that has got rid entirely of oracles and soothsayers, and only smiles at a ghost story. But such a line of argument is, even from its own point of view, hazardous; for if a single case of the supernatural in Shakespeare is accepted, all chance of his being presented as a modern rationalist is gone. Yet, unless violence is to be done to every indication of the text, who can explain away the Ghost in *Hamlet* or the Witches in *Macbeth?* The Ghost is seen

[1] *E.g.* Peter of Pomfret in the play of *King John.*

by different persons at the same time, by the same persons at different times; he makes known circumstances not known before, and subsequently confirmed by evidence. If this is not sufficient, by what kind of evidence will it ever be possible to substantiate objective existence? Similarly, the Witches not only appear to Banquo as well as to Macbeth, but they are shown alone, plying the ordinary trade of witches; if their predictions in the first act might be guesses, what is to be said of the fourth act, in which their apparitions foresee the history of Scotland for centuries and the union of the three crowns?[1] This is presented as supernatural knowledge, and only with supernatural knowledge can the scene be reconciled. I am not questioning that some of Shakespeare's supernatural phenomena can be explained as hallucinations; my argument is that in every case it must be a question of the evidence from the details of the play.

It is indeed not easy to find any criterion upon which we can absolutely rely for testing reality in the supernatural agencies of Shakespearean drama. It might have been expected that such a criterion would be found in the stage-directions, in which a dramatist speaks for himself. In Shakespeare there are doubts as to the authenticity of the stage-directions. But even if this point be waived, we find that what directions there are seem equivocal in their bearing on the present issue. The case has already been noted[2] of the Banquet Scene in *Macbeth*, where stage-directions declare that the Ghost sits in a particular chair, that it disappears and reappears, whereas it is certain in this instance that the apparition is wholly the creation of Macbeth's imagination; here then stage-directions are no more than a symbol, assisting us as to what Macbeth is supposed to see. A somewhat similar, but much more intricate case, is the second Ghost Scene in *Hamlet:*[3] here the opposing evidence is difficult to balance. On the one hand, the stage-directions state that the Ghost enters, that it makes exit; more than this, a speech of six lines is represented as spoken by

[1] *Macbeth:* IV. i. 120–121.

[2] Above, page 260.

[3] *Hamlet:* III. iv.

the Ghost. On the other hand, it is made positive that the apparition is seen and heard by none but Hamlet himself.

Queen. To whom do you speak this?
Hamlet. Do you see nothing there?
Queen. Nothing at all; yet all that is I see.
Hamlet. Nor did you nothing hear?
Queen. No, nothing but ourselves.
Hamlet. Why, look you there! look, how it steals away!
My father, in his habit as he lived!
Look, where he goes, even now, out at the portal!
[*Exit Ghost.*
Queen. This is the very coinage of your brain:
This bodiless creation ecstasy
Is very cunning in.
Hamlet. Ecstasy!
My pulse, as yours, doth temperately keep time,
And makes as healthful music: it is not madness
That I have utter'd: bring me to the test,
And I the matter will re-word; which madness
Would gambol from.

It is intelligible enough that a man who has once been so shocked, as Hamlet had been, by a visit from the unseen world should in a future moment of excitement, create the supernatural visitor by mental act. And this view receives support from the particular form taken by this second apparition; Hamlet has just been pouring out his soul in a vivid picture to his mother of the husband she had slighted, and the Ghost appears, not the armed warrior of the first act, but the subject of Hamlet's description:

My father, in his habit as he lived.

On the other hand, it does seem violence of interpretation to understand the Ghost's speech of six lines as nothing more than a symbolic way of indicating what Hamlet thinks. And yet certain considerations favour this view. As in the case of Macbeth,[1] it is what is uppermost in Hamlet's mind at the moment that would

[1] Compare above, pages 255, 260–262.

thus find expression in the form of hallucination. The spirit in which Hamlet goes to the interview with his mother is thus conveyed.[1]

Hamlet. 'Tis now the very witching time of night,
When churchyards yawn, and hell itself breathes out
Contagion to this world: now could I drink hot blood,
And do such bitter business as the day
Would quake to look on. Soft! now to my mother.
O heart, lose not thy nature; let not ever
The soul of Nero enter this firm bosom:
Let me be cruel, not unnatural:
I will speak daggers to her, but use none.

He is in a state of violent excitement; his mind is running upon apparitions from the grave and from hell; two thoughts are struggling within him — the two thoughts planted in his soul by the Ghost Scene of the first act — revenge, and some final tenderness to the mother. Now, the speech attributed to the apparition is just made up of these two thoughts.

Hamlet. Do you not come your tardy son to chide,
That, lapsed in time and passion, lets go by
The important acting of your dread command?
O, say!
Ghost. Do not forget: this visitation
Is but to whet thy almost blunted purpose.
But, look, amazement on thy mother sits:
O, step between her and her fighting soul:
Conceit in weakest bodies strongest works:
Speak to her, Hamlet.

The first word of the apparition, put into his mouth by Hamlet's question, is the revenge; the second, is the relenting to the woman's weakness. And this speech makes the turning-point of the scene: of the two ideas contending all along for mastery in Hamlet's mind he has hitherto carried out the one; from this point he devotes himself to the other. Real or not real, the

[1] *Hamlet:* III. ii. 406.

Ghost gives expression to the mind of Hamlet. Between indications so evenly balanced I will not undertake to pronounce. But a third alternative is worthy of consideration. Seeing that ghosts belong, not to the domain of natural law, but to the unknown supernatural, may it be that objective and subjective have no application to them? or that they can appear objective and subjective at the same time? Just as, even within the limits of the positive world, there are objective vibrations of air so rapid that only some ears, and not all, can catch them, so may it be a quality of the supernatural apparition that it has objective existence, yet is perceptible, not to all eyes and ears, but only to those of one tuned (so to speak) into harmony with the mind of the apparition, by crime, or kinship, or mission of revenge?

The general drift of these remarks is, that the important question in reference to supernatural agencies in Shakespeare is, not their objective reality, but their function in the plot. Does the course of the drama indicate that what appears as a manifestation of something outside ordinary Nature can exercise influence upon men and events? On the answer to this depends the question whether supernatural agency is one of the forces of life in Shakespeare's world.

On this point it appears to me that three propositions may be laid down. First: Supernatural agency in Shakespeare has no power to influence events unless by influencing persons. A large proportion of the supernatural in these dramas is concerned with the indication of future events. The event always agrees with the prediction: the knowledge of the future is supernatural. We are thus brought to the grand question which has perplexed theology for centuries: Does foreknowledge imply predestination? Whatever may be the truth in theology, the practice of Shakespeare is unmistakable. The key-note is given by the striking words which Banquo addresses to the Witches:

> If you can look into the seeds of time,
> And say which grain will grow and which will not,
> Speak then to me.[1]

[1] *Macbeth*: I. iii. 58.

A power is implied which is superhuman, the power to read the future. But the future so read is a future brought about by natural causes, by seed and its fructification, and by no other power. On this text Shakespeare's whole treatment of the supernatural is a comment: there is infallible prediction, there is also a rational train of causes and effects bringing about the issue predicted. Such foreshadowings as omens, oracles, visions, affect the question only negatively; in these cases we have pure revelation of the future, with no suggestion of an agency behind prediction or fulfilment. The Ghosts who make the vision of *Richard the Third* point to the morrow; but there is nothing to imply that they can affect the issue of the battle — except by depressing the spirits of Richard and raising those of Richmond. But the leading illustration of this principle is of course the play of *Macbeth*. Here the Witches make elaborate predictions of the future, all of them exactly fulfilled. In each case however Shakespeare has enabled us to see a regular succession of natural causes, amply sufficient to bring about the result. Macbeth is to be thane of Glamis and thane of Cawdor; he becomes the first by his father's death, the second by promotion to the position of the rebel he had overcome; there is no room here for intervention of the Witches. Macbeth is told he shall be king: we have had occasion to trace the fluctuation of events by which he becomes king, but there is no hint of the influence of the Witches, except so far as their words may have influenced Macbeth himself in the part he plays. The Witches make the double-edged forecast as to Banquo, that he shall be lesser than Macbeth and yet greater, that he shall get kings though he be none; all is fulfilled in the moment when the father is struck by murderers, and in the dark the nimble son escapes; yet in this attack the Witches do not appear, unless it was their words that set Macbeth on to this crime. Yet again, there is the dark saying about Birnam Wood coming to Dunsinane; but we know by how natural a train of incidents the marvel was made a reality; no supernatural instigation, but only a happy thought of military stratagem brought it

about.[1] There was another dark saying, that only the man "not born of woman" could slay Macbeth; we are allowed to see how the individual to whom alone that description applies receives an injury of his own from the tyrant, in addition to the injuries he resents on behalf of his country;[2] the double motive brings Macduff naturally to the vengeance, in which, it is easy to understand, his passionate power is irresistible. The supernatural agencies revealed by Shakespeare stand aloof from the game of life as spectators; as spectators they can see further than the players; but they have no means of affecting the play itself, except so far as what they report may influence the minds of the players.

How far then can supernatural agencies influence persons in the drama? Here a second proposition may be laid down: The supernatural has no power over men except by their own consent. It may be asked, How does Richard consent to the ghostly visitants who torment him, or where is there consent to the omens which disturb the world of the Roman plays? The answer is, that consent is given by deeds as well as by words. Crime is a debt: Richard has given his victims' ghosts the hold on him that the creditor has on the lingering debtor. The application of the principle to the omens in *Julius Cæsar* is very clear. To the world at large these are meaningless; they come down with a weight of influence only on those who in their hearts have accepted that to which the omens are pointing. Casca[3] pours out a description of the heavens in supernatural convulsion; Cicero makes answer:

> Why, saw you anything more wonderful?

Still more excitedly Casca tells of portents on earth passing belief; still his interlocutor remarks coolly:

> Indeed, it is a strange-disposed time:
> But men may construe things after their fashion,
> Clean from the purpose of the things themselves.

[1] *Macbeth:* V. iv. [2] *Macbeth:* IV. iii, from 159. [3] *Julius Cæsar:* I. iii.

In a moment Cassius comes: how does he treat the wild phenomena on which Casca is so eloquent?

Cassius. For my part, I have walk'd about the streets,
Submitting me unto the perilous night,
And, thus unbraced, Casca, as you see,
Have bared my bosom to the thunder-stone . . .
Now could I, Casca, name to thee a man
Most like this dreadful night,
That thunders, lightens, open graves, and roars
As doth the lion in the Capitol,
A man no mightier than thyself or me
In personal action, yet prodigious grown
And fearful, as these strange eruptions are.
Casca. 'Tis Cæsar that you mean.

Cicero and the innocent see curiosities, where men with conspiracy in their hearts see encouraging omens from heaven. The play of *Macbeth* is again in point. The Witches first meet the hero in company with Banquo: Banquo questions in vain, but as soon as Macbeth speaks a single word, the predictions flow out.[1] As we have seen, Macbeth's start explains the difference: he had already sworn treason against King Duncan in his heart. The second time the Witches exercise their function, it is Macbeth who has sought them out, and by the power of curses forced them, in spite of their resistance, to speak of the future.[2] The principle applies similarly to *Hamlet*.[3] When Bernardo and Marcellus first see the Ghost, they fear to question, and the apparition makes no communication. When Horatio goes further and addresses the strange figure thus —

What art thou, that usurp'st this time of night,
Together with that fair and warlike form
In which the majesty of buried Denmark
Did sometimes march? —

his unfortunate word "usurp'st" implies a doubt, and the apparition stalks offended away. On its return, Horatio makes solemn

[1] *Macbeth:* I. iii. 39–50. [2] *Macbeth:* III. iv. 132; IV. i. 50. [3] *Hamlet:* I. i, iv.

adjuration; the apparition seems about to speak, when the sound of cock-crow marks the end of night's limitation. Subsequently Hamlet himself recognises his father, and implores communication of his thought: only then is the revelation fully vouchsafed. In each case consent to receive the revelation is implied. All this may seem to amount to no more than the popular superstition, that a ghost cannot speak until spoken to. But it is striking that the great traditional machinery of the supernatural — a celestial and an infernal hierarchy impelling men to good and to evil — is absent entirely from Shakespeare's world; the only angels who appear signify to Katherine that the victory of life is won; the only fiends are invoked by La Pucelle, and signify their powerlessness to help.[1] Shakespeare's supernatural agencies are what Banquo calls them — instruments of darkness: of no significance except in hands that consent to use them.

We may go yet further in the third of our propositions: The influence in Shakespeare of the supernatural on persons is seen to emphasise and assist, but never to initiate or alter, a course of action. Supernatural power can only — to borrow a Shakespearean phrase — marshal men the way that they are going. In *Winter's Tale* Leontes has passionately invoked the oracle as his final court of appeal: as soon as it has spoken against him he exclaims:

> There is no truth at all i' the oracle:
> The sessions shall proceed: this is mere falsehood.

It takes natural events — the report of son and wife's death — to turn him from his headlong career. Richard after the Ghost Scene declares that shadows have struck more terror to his soul than all the forces of the enemy: but he only fights the harder in the morrow's battle. As before, it is the plays of *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* that are the crucial tests of Shakespeare's mode of handling the supernatural. In the former we have a series of shocks, each promising to change Macbeth's action, each ending by leaving it where it would otherwise have been. The word "Thou shalt be King"

[1] *Henry the Eighth:* IV. ii; *I Henry the Sixth:* V. iii.

(as we have seen[1]) inflames for the moment Macbeth's former purpose of treason; at the end of the scene he drops the treason; in the next scene — for rational considerations — he falls back to his first plans. When the Witches have promised Banquo greatness higher than Macbeth's, does not this (it may be asked) impel Macbeth to the murder of his rival? We have his whole feeling unveiled in soliloquy.[2]

> Our fears in Banquo
> Stick deep; and in his royalty of nature
> Reigns that which would be fear'd; 'tis much he dares;
> And, to that dauntless temper of his mind,
> He hath a wisdom that doth guide his valour
> To act in safety. There is none but he
> Whose being I do fear: and, under him,
> My genius is rebuked; as, it is said,
> Mark Antony's was by Cæsar. He chid the sisters
> When first they put the name of King upon me,
> And bade them speak to him: then prophet-like
> They hail'd him father to a line of kings.

Macbeth enlarges on this prediction, making it a motive in his design against Banquo, yet only one motive amongst others; in the event itself, as we have seen,[3] it is neither this nor the other sources of hatred that actually determine the expedition against Banquo, but a sudden emergency in which Banquo's presence is a special danger. When the apparitions say to Macbeth —

> Beware the thane of Fife:

he instantly answers —

> Thou has harp'd my fear aright.

Does not the oracle about Birnam Wood affect Macbeth's action, by leading him to shut himself up in Dunsinane Castle? Apparently it does; but Macbeth's description of that fortress —

> Our castle's strength
> Will laugh a siege to scorn: here let them lie
> Till famine and the ague eat them up —

[1] Above, pages 251-252. [2] *Macbeth*: III. i. 49. [3] Above, pages 258-259.

suggests that in any case this would have been the position in which he would have awaited an invading army. The promise of safety against all born of women might have been expected to set Macbeth's mind at ease; on the contrary, he surrounds himself with just the same reign of terror that other tryants use who have no supernatural backing.

The play of *Hamlet* tests our third principle more severely. At first sight it would seem that the intervention of the Ghost initiates the whole action of the drama. Yet it is notable, in the scene of Hamlet and the Ghost, that when the actual point of the revelation is reached —

> The serpent that did sting thy father's life
> Now wears his crown —

Hamlet instantly interjects —

> O my prophetic soul!
> My uncle!

Hamlet's own mind had anticipated the supernatural revelation. This throws light on his suspicion of "foul play," on his still earlier expression of the weariness of all life, which at the time seemed out of proportion to surrounding circumstances.[1] Hamlet's whole spirit had been clouded over with a vague sense of horror: the word of the Ghost simply precipitates this into a definite thought of crime. As the action proceeds our principle receives fresh confirmation. The ghostly visitant with all his dread authority imposes on Hamlet a distinct task of vengeance, and Hamlet under this influence passionately accepts the commission. As a fact, does he act upon it? He soon falls back into sceptical doubt of the character of the apparition; must lay a scheme for confirmation, and gets it to the full. Still does he act? He is passionately resolved to act, is ever reproaching himself for delay; but in actual fact the supernatural commission is never fulfilled, and the king is slain at last by a sudden impulse of Hamlet, prompted by another crime that moment discovered.

[1] *Hamlet:* I. ii. 256, and whole scene from line 66.

Thus slight is the degree of influence Shakespeare admits for supernatural manifestations: they cannot deflect men from a course of action, they can but give this a touch of impetus. The popular feeling is that communications from the unseen world, if such things can be, must be most powerful motives in human action. Powerful such supernatural interference would be in disturbing the imagination and the emotions; but it is the regular order of natural influences which alone can govern action. Shakespeare's treatment of the supernatural is but a comment on the text: If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.

One doubt remains: if so little is permitted to supernatural agency, was it worth while to introduce it at all? In reality, the function of the supernatural in Shakespeare is most important; but it is a function addressed, not to the persons in the story, but to the spectator of the drama. Shakespeare inherits from ancient literature the whole conception of Destiny. This Destiny found expression in the Classical Drama chiefly in the form of the 'oracular action': a mysterious oracle of the future is gradually cleared up in meaning as it is gradually fulfilled. Shakespeare retains enough of the supernatural to make possible this oracular action in a plot, but rejects the idea of Destiny as a force controlling events. All that is necessary for the dramatic effect is foreknowledge. Even in sober prose a succession of commonplace incidents can be vividly interesting when, at the end, the historian brings out the principle underlying the incidents. Drama must go beyond history, and borrows enough of the supernatural to make the future issues send a flash-light into the events while still in progress. Seen in this light of a known future, the course of events, though natural and regular, is imbued with some strange colour. There is the colour of mystery. Birnam Wood moving to Dunsinane Castle: how is it possible? Curiosity is prolonged until, in the most unexpected yet intelligible action of an army knowing nothing of the prediction, the impossible has become an accomplished fact. Or, there is the colour of irony, a tinge of

mockery cast over a succession of events. The supernatural has proclaimed that Macbeth shall be king. But to this kingship, not in itself improbable, we the spectators see a formidable obstacle arise — the proclamation of an heir apparent; when we further see that this proclamation leads Macbeth to take up again the treason he had dropped, when the obstacle in the way of the prediction is thus converted into a step toward its fulfilment, we seem to catch a spirit of mockery in the natural course of history. Again and again the effect is repeated. Duncan's son and heir has escaped when his father is murdered, but this flight of the son diverts public suspicion from Macbeth to himself, and Macbeth is proclaimed king. Macbeth is supernaturally guaranteed against all not born of women, yet is bidden beware the thane of Fife. As an extra precaution Macbeth sends out to destroy this thane and his whole family. We the spectators are allowed to see the thane of Fife — the man not born of woman — just about to give up his vengeance and quit his country, when the news of the raid, that destroyed all his family but missed himself, brings him back to the mission which none can accomplish but himself.[1] Every single detail is rational and intelligible: but in the light of the predicted future the succession of details seems to be a mocking conspiracy.

To sum up. Supernatural agency has a place in the world of Shakespeare. Among the forces of life, it has no power except to accentuate what already exists; but it has great power to illuminate life for those who are life's spectators. To express a principle of drama in language of the theatre: On the stage of human life man is the only actor; to supernatural agency it is given to manœuvre the footlights.

[1] *Macbeth:* IV. iii, from III.

XV

MORAL ACCIDENT AND OVERRULING PROVIDENCE

In an earlier chapter of this book we have seen that accident is to be reckoned among the things that determine issues in human life. We saw the story of Romeo and Juliet as permeated with the accidental; its great turning-point — the friar messenger stopped at the door of the infected house — is a piece of pure chance that is efficient cause of a triple tragedy. Similar cases abound in other plays. In *The Comedy of Errors* the maze of cross purposes follows by natural sequence from the original situation, and might well bring the various parties concerned to the priory; but it is an accident that they appear just as the procession of Ægeon to his execution is passing; five minutes difference either way would have made the comedy into a tragedy. In *Much Ado about Nothing* the natural thing for the Watch to do is, not to arrest prisoners, but to "go sit here on the church-bench till two, and then to bed." By accident they overhear a conversation they do not understand, and arrest an important personage without knowing it, taking him for an accomplice of the thief Deformed; then accident is multiplied into accident as, when they bring their prisoner before the governor, Leonato's patience gives out, and he devolves the examination, just before he would have heard what would have saved his own daughter from public shame. The Outlaws in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* are not a blockading force who stop all travellers leaving Milan; yet they happen to stop, first Valentine, then in succession all the personages associated with his story, whose presence upon one and the same spot is the only thing necessary to resolve a complicated situation. And a play like *Cymbeline* has a vein of accident run-

ning right through it: that Imogen in her wanderings should find the cave where her lost brothers live, that the poison, given as a precious drug to Pisanio, should be transferred innocently to his mistress and tasted when she is alone in the cave, that she should be buried just where the march of the Roman army should encounter her on waking from her trance — these and the like make a chain of coincidences, not of cause and effect, and assist us to realise how much in life of the actual rests upon the casual.

It need cause no difficulty that the word 'accident' as here used admits of no precise definition. We are reminded of the old logical Fallacy of the Sorites, which would fain question the existence of a heap of corn, on the ground that no one could determine how many ears of corn would have to be removed before it ceased to be a heap. It is not by any amount of the unforeseen and unexpected, less or more, that an event is made into an accident. Life is full of the unexpected; a man who has no resource to meet what has not been foreseen lacks an important part of the equipment of life, and must expect to suffer accordingly. I have ventured to use the term 'moral accident.' In the external universe we may make it a postulate that everything shall be deemed to have a cause; the moral world, on the contrary, concerns individual lives, and there must be many things determining the fate of an individual which are nevertheless entirely outside his control, which appear therefore in his moral field as causeless. It is thus not any analytic quality of the circumstance itself, but some relation between circumstances and personality, that makes the basis of moral accident. We must not call the arrival of the Players in *Hamlet* an accident; true, he was not expecting them, but their coming was a natural part of court life; if they had not appeared, some other device would have been used by the prince to make his test of the King. It is otherwise with the incident of the Pirates in the same play. Possibly the marine insurance of the times would recognise piracy among its risks; but that pirates should attack this particular ship, that in boarding Hamlet should

be the only man borne off, that this should upset entirely the well-laid plan of the King and alter Hamlet's whole future — here is the combination of fateful circumstances making a moral accident. It is instructive to consider in this light the slaying of Polonius. From Hamlet's point of view there is in this nothing accidental; it is just in accordance with his character to strike while the iron is hot, and to be benumbed by the time of cooling. But from the standpoint of Polonius this small piece of harmless fussiness setting in motion such a ponderous force of reaction goes beyond the bounds of cause and effect, and sinks into the accidental. Thus the same incident may be a moral accident to one of the persons concerned in it, not to another.

Shakespeare's most elaborate treatment of accident is in *The Merchant of Venice*. But in approaching this masterpiece it is necessary to protest against the confusion introduced into its analysis by modern attempts to clear Shakespeare from the charge of intolerance. We have grown ashamed of the spirit of persecution with which mediæval Christianity visited a people in some respects — notably in finance — representing a higher civilisation than its own. Attempt is made to suggest that Shakespeare was above this. Stress is laid upon such passages as this.

Shylock. Signior Antonio, many a time and oft
In the Rialto you have rated me
About my moneys and my usances:
Still have I borne it with a patient shrug,
For sufferance is the badge of all our tribe.
You call me misbeliever, cut-throat dog,
And spit upon my Jewish gaberdine,
And all for use of that which is mine own.
Well then, it now appears you need my help:
Go to, then; you come to me, and you say
'Shylock, we would have moneys:' you say so;
You, that did void your rheum upon my beard
And foot me as you spurn a stranger cur
Over your threshold: moneys is your suit. . . .

Antonio. I am as like to call thee so again,
To spit on thee again, to spurn thee too.
If thou wilt lend this money, lend it not
As to thy friends; for when did friendship take
A breed for barren metal of his friend?
But lend it rather to thine enemy,
Who, if he break, thou mayst with better face
Exact the penalty.

The suggestion is that Shakespeare is enlisting sympathy for the oppressed Jews; that the arrogant intolerance of Antonio is the error on which the peril of his life is soon to come down as a judgment. I should be only too glad on this point to be convinced; but I am bound to say that there appears to me not a shred of support in the whole play for this interpretation. Antonio is represented as the most ideal of characters, and his intolerance is part of his perfection — an uncompromising hatred of what (according to the spirit of the times) ought to be hated. When the Christian merchant is brought low, neither by himself nor by others is there any recognition of rebuked pride; on the contrary, it is as a martyr that Antonio suffers.

Antonio. He seeks my life; his reason well I know:
I oft deliver'd from his forfeitures
Many that have at times made moan to me;
Therefore he hates me.

When Antonio has triumphed, he couples his 'mercy' to Shylock with the condition that Shylock shall become a Christian, which the court confirms as if it were a matter of course. All this is in full accord with the mediæval feud of Jew and Christian. It is true that, in the passage quoted above and in other passages, sympathy is being enlisted with the wrongs of Shylock; but for what purpose? The traditional Story of the Pound of Flesh involves a malice so hideously inhuman that it becomes difficult to conceive; the dramatist emphasises the wrongs done to Shylock as so many incentives to revenge, helping to make the particular

revenge taken less incredible. Of course, it is always right to sympathise with trouble and to be indignant at the sight of wrong; but sympathy should not be confused with partisanship. It may be well to drop a tear over Shylock staggering dazed out of the court to go to his lonely home; but it should not be forgotten that even this is a slighter ruin than the fate which, only a few minutes before, Shylock was clamoring to inflict upon his adversary. The sentimentalism that would make Shylock the real hero of *The Merchant of Venice* savours of the little child's remark on the famous painting of the martyrs cast to lions — that there was one poor little lion that had not got a martyr.

With this prejudice cleared out of the way, we can do justice to the elaborate plot of the play.[1] In the main story we have, not simply a Christian and a Jew, but a supremely noble Christian and a supremely base Jew. Antonio is a combination of dignified strength with almost womanly tenderness towards his young friend Bassanio; all in the play feel the greatness of this character, not the least of them the incomparable Portia. Shylock is — what the traditional story requires — a monster of cruelty and greed in his public life; in private, we have his daughter's authority for it that his house is a hell.[2] Yet the course of events is such that this supremely noble Christian is helplessly at the mercy of the base Jew; and how has it been brought about? By the most extreme example of the accidental ever imagined in fiction. It would have been a remarkable accident if all Antonio's ships had been wrecked, so vast is his enterprise, and so prudent is he in distributing risks. But as a fact, not a single ship miscarries: yet the merchant himself, his creditors, his friends, the business world, all act upon the belief that all the ventures are lost, and this in a matter of bankruptcy and of life and death. If an accidental occurrence seems almost too slight a motive for dramatic action, how infinitely slight and

[1] Compare the scheme of the play in the Appendix below, page 347. *The Merchant of Venice* is discussed in detail in Chapters I to III of my *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist.*

[2] *Merchant of Venice:* II. iii. 2.

nebulous must seem a concatenation of false rumours of accident. But all this is only half the story. In the other half the wheel goes round, and it is the Jew who is helpless before his Christian adversary: and how has this come to pass? Shakespeare keeps up the traditional story, which overthrows the bond because it contains no provision for shedding of blood; but he puts this plea in the mouth of a girl. The real legal plea is added afterwards, common sense coming to buttress up the picturesque: Portia has consulted with the learned Bellario, who supplies her with the fact that there is a statute making Shylock's proposal of the bond a capital offence.[1] The extraordinary thing is that neither Antonio and his well-paid advisers, nor the Jews to whom the law meant so much, nor the court of Venice which seems to have taken counsel's opinion on its own account,[2] should have known of this Statute of Aliens, dug out of the dust heap of forgotten legislation by a single exceptional pundit. The reversal of the action, as well as the earlier phase of it, rests upon a hair's-breadth chance. The whole story takes unity as the exhibition, in twofold form, of character wholly under the dominion of accident.

With this story of the Jew the plot of *The Merchant of Venice* interweaves the story of the Caskets. A father with a vast fortune and a precious daughter to dispose of rests the possession of both on a choice between caskets; for ground of choice there is nothing but the three metals and the three mottoes; each is a precarious guide, the combination of the two dissipates precarious indication into pure chance. We have thus an elaborately contrived accident as the essence of the situation. It has been noted in an earlier chapter[3] what ensues: suitors go honestly through trains of reasoning in an irrational issue, but the spectator sees how the whole character of each suitor determines his choice, making Morocco lean to gold, Arragon to desert, the true lover Bassanio to hazarding in preference to receiving. The problem of the accidental has been solved by force of character. And the whole

[1] *Merchant of Venice:* IV. i, from 347. [2] *Merchant of Venice:* IV. i. 104.
[3] Above, pages 245–246.

plot of the drama thus balances before our eyes, in parallel movements: on the one side character at the mercy of accident, on the other side accident wholly dominated by character.

So methodical a treatment of accident as this play affords leads us naturally to a further step in our survey of the subject. So far we have considered accident only negatively: its recognition saves us from seeking to make such principles as retribution universal, and so degrading the moral into the mechanical. But may it be possible to read a more positive significance into the accidental, and give it a more definite place in a moral system?

The question at once puts us in touch with a venerable speculation of popular thought. When a modern reader applies himself to the life and literature of Greek antiquity, perhaps nothing impresses him more at first than the wide acceptance of the omen and the influence of mantic art. In profundity and subtlety of intellect the Greek is at least the equal of the modern mind. Yet this wise people is seen, in the regulation of daily life, to give anxious attention to things which a modern observer can only regard as flimsy puerilities. If a beast is slain for a sacrificial feast, the entrails are carefully inspected; their normal or abnormal appearance, or the kind of sputtering they make in the fire, is accepted as indication of good fortune or evil to come. The movement of flickering flame is precisely marked; observatories are built for studying the zigzag darting of flying birds; the exact itinerary of the wayward lightning flash is a question of importance; it makes a difference whether the sudden thunder clap was heard on the right side or on the left; a sneeze, a bodily convulsion, a chance word of greeting, a stumble over a threshold — all these may be ominous of futurity. Now, it will be noted that the one element common to all these different kinds of omen is the purely accidental nature of the thing observed. Greek subtlety has seized upon what is furthest removed from orderly habit and regularity of occurrence, and to this it looks for tokens from the Supreme. For that portion of the universe which manifests itself in the form of law is limited by law; if the higher will

is ever to indicate itself it must be by using some machinery that is outside the course of law. The philosophy of the omen is that accident is the only possible revelation of Destiny.

A similar conception enters into modern thought, though of course it finds very different degrees of acceptance in different minds. A man sets out for the train by which he goes every day to the city; he turns back because he has forgotten his pocket-handkerchief; he thereby misses his train by just half a minute; the train is wrecked and many are killed. Instantly the man is conscious of a supreme will in the universe, and that it has interfered for his protection. Suppose that the individual in question had been possessed of a peculiar sensitiveness to magnetic conditions of the atmosphere, that on this particular morning the air struck him as in an abnormal condition favorable to snapping of axles or rails, and that on this account he postponed his journey: then the subsequent wreck would have raised no thoughts in the man's mind beyond the beauty of the science of magnetics. It was the purely accidental character of what occurred — the trifle of a forgotten handkerchief saving a life — that kindled the conception of a special providence; and it was not for the man in the excitement of a personal revelation to trouble himself with the question of the other people who remembered their handkerchiefs and were killed.

In ancient and modern thought alike then there is at least a tendency to associate accident with supreme providence; not indeed the providence of everyday life, which reveals itself in the form of regular and orderly law, but what may be called Overruling Providence — the supreme power of the universe acting outside law. The idea of course is not that all apparent accidents are so to be interpreted; but that, if providential power other than regular law is to act at all, it is only in the form of the accidental that it can manifest itself.

Shakespeare's great treatment of this particular aspect of his moral system is the play of *Hamlet*. In this perplexing and difficult plot we have at all events the assistance of an interpretation

coming from the poem itself. Horatio, Hamlet's confidant all through, is deputed by the dying prince to read the lesson of the whole story. We never hear Horatio's explanation; but the summary he makes of what he is to say is itself instructive.

> And let me speak to the yet unknowing world
> How these things came about: so shall you hear
> Of carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts,
> Of accidental judgements, casual slaughters,
> Of deaths put on by cunning and forced cause,
> And, in this upshot, purposes mistook
> Fall'n on the inventors' heads.[1]

Evidently the association of accident and overruling providence is a main thought of Horatio's homily; and the facts of the play fully support this interpretation.

In the main plot[2] of *Hamlet* (as in *Cymbeline*) we can note a system of graded wrong, with appropriate nemesis and pathos; but in each single case there is the intervention of accident. At one end of the scale we have the gross crime of the King — murder of a brother and King to gain the brother's wife and kingdom. Eventually due retribution comes from the natural avenger of blood. Yet, although the murdered father comes from his grave to stir up his son and avenger, Hamlet is seen to hesitate and delay, is for ever on the verge of avenging and yet stops short: until accident intervenes in the circumstance of the poison prepared by the King for Hamlet being tasted by the Queen. Then the full nemesis descends: the King has just time to see himself the murderer of the woman he loves, and then falls at the hand of his brother's avenger. Next, we have the lesser crime of the Queen: yet crime we must call it, for the implication of the whole story is a guilty love while her first husband is yet alive. Nemesis overtakes her, as she meets her death from her lover's hand: yet by accident, for the death was meant for her son, and — to add pathos to her fall —

[1] *Hamlet:* V. ii. 390.

[2] Compare the scheme of the play in the Appendix below, page 364.

it was anxiety over the position of this well-loved son that made the thirst so fatally quenched. We now pass outside crime, to what is merely unwisdom. The wrong of Polonius amounts to no more than politic intermeddling; and he meets a meddler's fate — yet by accident, a fate intended for another.

> Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell!
> I took thee for thy better: take thy fortune;
> Thou find'st to be too busy is some danger.

Much the same may be said of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

> They are not near my conscience; their defeat
> Does by their own insinuation grow:
> 'Tis dangerous when the baser nature comes
> Between the pass and fell incensed points
> Of mighty opposites.

Their nemesis is to go unconsciously to the doom to which they were assisting Hamlet. And it is accident that has so decreed: the accident is one of those strange, unaccountable impressions that sometimes come upon a man, so that he feels irrational in acting on them, and yet in the sequel finds overpowering justification. If it seems to be straining this word accident to extend it so far, I can only say that it is Hamlet himself who is responsible for the interpretation. With these words he introduces his story of the feeling which prompted him to open the sealed packet.

> Sir, in my heart there was a kind of fighting,
> That would not let me sleep: methought I lay
> Worse than the mutines in the bilboes. Rashly,
> And praised be rashness for it, let us know,
> Our indiscretion sometimes serves us well,
> When our deep plots do pall; and that should teach us
> There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
> Rough-hew them how we will.[1]

Of Ophelia the only evil is that she is not strong enough for the situation in which she finds herself; gifted with clearer insight

[1] *Hamlet:* V. ii. 4, and whole scene.

than that of others around her, the force of maidenly tradition checks her from acting on her instincts as to Hamlet. It is simple love yielding to unfavourable circumstances; and the agony that follows brings Ophelia to pathetic doom, and yet a doom which only the accidental breaking of a tree bough made irremediable. As Ophelia appears a type of simple love, so Laertes represents simple sense of duty — to avenge a father's slaughter. Yet Laertes, like his sister, yields to circumstances, and is persuaded to exchange the public demand of justice for the fine scheme of private revenge:[1] accident once more intervenes, and — in the extraordinary shuffling of the foils — Laertes is pierced with the poisoned weapon he intended for another.

Six times has the retributive principle in the universe asserted itself, and six times it has been an "accidental judgement." But in the wide field of action thus displayed what has been the motive force? Nothing but the character of the hero, the peculiar character of Hamlet. He is the great type of the inner life preponderating over the life without. Above all things Hamlet is the man of introspection; his luminous subtlety in self-analysis has made this the classical poem of soul philosophy. His agile mind-play extending over the whole field of intellect and emotion enables him at will to assume even distraction, and use it as a stalking horse for his designs. But the moment Hamlet essays to act in the common world of men his emotional strength dissipates into sceptical indecision; newer and ever newer trains of thought about acting exhaust the energy to act. The tragedy of Hamlet is that to the ideal man of the life within is intrusted a bold enterprise of the life without. How the Ghost's commission would have been executed if confided to a Macbeth or an Antony it is easy to imagine: the guilty King would have fallen by a single telling blow, and justice would have been satisfied. But as it is, the tentative hesitation of Hamlet enlarges the area of wrong; for all the evil and ruin of the play — except the original crime that precedes the rise of the curtain — the delay of Hamlet is the occasion. And

[1] *Hamlet:* IV. vii, from 60.

at last a sudden flash of action on Hamlet's part puts the finishing stroke to the whole tragedy. But this sudden determination seems possible for Hamlet only in the face of accident: of that twofold revelation of accident, that in a moment showed him the poisoned foil slaying the slayer as well as the victim, the poisoned drink intended for the enemy slaying the poisoner's beloved queen.

The whole play of *Hamlet* is a rich blend of three elements: character, accident, nemesis, are here all interwoven.[1] And the sense of overruling providence to which such coöperation points has never been more aptly phrased than in the famous saying of Hamlet —

> There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
> Rough-hew them how we will.

These moral accidents are sudden openings into the unknown, giving us scattered intimations of a supreme Power behind the visible course of things, overruling all. Can Shakespeare go further, and afford us any revelation of the supreme Power itself? The Shakespearean Drama does not, like *Job* or *Faust*, give us a Council in Heaven, with Deity expounding his own purposes. Nor does it, like the Passion-Play of Ober-Ammergau, present Deity descended to earth, exhibiting itself in human form and human action. But there is a third alternative: to display humanity ascending, not indeed into heaven, but at least to the position of an overruling providence. "If I were God —": there is nothing irreverent in the fancy, and such a speculation, carried into detail, will bring the providential control of the universe home to our minds through our imagination and our sympathies. Now this is precisely the idea underlying Shakespeare's play of *The Tempest*. As remarked before, this is not a play of real life; Shakespeare assumes the hypothesis of enchantment. Enchantment is, within the enchanted circle, omnipotence; Prospero is, for the enchanted island, and for the single day during which his spells have force, a supreme controller of events. Accordingly,

[1] Compare the scheme of the play below, page 364.

as we follow the course of the poem, we are watching in dramatic presentation the mind of an overruling providence.

I have elsewhere treated in detail *The Tempest* as a study of personal providence.[1] A few points only need be instanced here. Our first sign of providential control is the tempest itself, which is raised by Prospero to sweep his foes within the circle of his power, yet which is held in such restraint that there is no harm —

> No, not so much perdition as an hair
> Betid to any creature in the vessel
> Which thou heardst cry, which thou saw'st sink.

Here is a hint of the great mystery of providence, by which the course of the objective world, common to all, can yet be made to work high purposes in the subjective lives of single individuals. After a back glance into the past, in which the providential work of mercy and judgment has been (so to speak) rehearsed in the control of the elemental beings Ariel and Caliban, we have a new phase as Miranda, out of her charmed sleep, wakes to behold Ferdinand, drawn on by enchanted music.

Prospero. At the first sight they have changed eyes.

What appeared an accident in the meeting of Romeo and Juliet, now is seen as the direct act of a controlling power. Not less suggestive is the remaining course of this love episode :

Prospero. This swift business
I must uneasy make, lest too light winning
Make the prize light.

What might be drawn as a lesson from a course of events at the end, is here at the beginning made a providential purpose.

A striking episode in the play is the Conspiracy of Antonio and Sebastian : conscienceless villains, just saved from the awful tempest, and already brooding over new schemes of treason.[2] Mys-

[1] In my *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist*, Chapter XIII.
[2] *Tempest :* II. i, from 191.

teriously the whole train of courtiers, and the King himself, are suddenly locked in sleep; Antonio and Sebastian are left wide awake. With increasing force the suggestiveness of the situation gains upon them; it has become irresistible, and the two swords are being drawn from their sheaths, when in a moment the air has become vocal as the voice of Ariel warning Gonzalo: the courtiers spring to their feet, and face the two guilty men, elaborating excuses for their drawn swords. Thus finely are touched two of the deepest mysteries in the conception of providential control: the providence of opportunity, that lures the sinner on to his sin; the not less strange providence of accident, interposing when of other salvation there seems no hope.

For the central incident of the drama we naturally look when the cruel authors of Prospero's expulsion from Milan encounter their victim in his plenitude of omnipotence.[1] A supernatural banquet invites the exhausted King and his courtiers; then, ere they can partake, the banquet vanishes and gives place to the avenging harpy, and the speech of doom is heard.

> You are three men of sin, whom Destiny,
> That hath to instrument this lower world
> And what is in't, the never-surfeited sea
> Hath caused to belch up you; and on this island
> Where man doth not inhabit; you 'mongst men
> Being most unfit to live. I have made you mad;
> And even with such-like valour men hang and drown
> Their proper selves.
>
> [*Alonso, Sebastian, etc., draw their swords.*
>
> You fools! I and my fellows
> Are ministers of Fate: the elements,
> Of whom your swords are temper'd, may as well
> Wound the loud winds, or with bemock'd-at stabs
> Kill the still-closing waters, as diminish
> One dowle that's in my plume: my fellow-ministers
> Are like invulnerable. If you could hurt,
> Your swords are now too massy for your strengths

[1] *Tempest:* III. iii.

> And will not be uplifted. But remember —
> For that's my business to you — that you three
> From Milan did supplant good Prospero;
> Exposed unto the sea, which hath requit it,
> Him and his innocent child: for which foul deed
> The powers, delaying, not forgetting, have
> Incensed the seas and shores, yea, all the creatures,
> Against your peace. Thee of thy son, Alonso,
> They have bereft; and do pronounce by me,
> Lingering perdition, worse than any death
> Can be at once, shall step by step attend
> You and your ways; whose wraths to guard you from —
> Which here, in this most desolate isle, else falls
> Upon your heads — is nothing but heart-sorrow
> And a clear life ensuing.

Charmed from man's first instinct of physical resistance, sundered from the comforting neighbourhood of fellow-men, cut off from the regular course of nature which is the foundation on which rests the sense of security, alone with their sin and with Destiny — a Destiny whose agencies fill all space, while all time is but the delaying which is no forgetting — the three men of sin have awakened in a single moment to the whole doom of lingering perdition, and have just enough sanity left to know the sense of madness. Here is the Shakespearean conception of hell: but it is a present hell, and a hell from which there is just one path of escape, in contrition and a purified life.

Omnipotence has put forth its utmost of power: with what effect? Alonso is seen in agonies of remorse, the Alonso who before he came within Prospero's enchantment had a heart to suffer, who heard the name of Prospero in every thunderclap and whistle of the threatening storm.[1] But Antonio and Sebastian, the hard-hearted, are hardened still further into resistance.

> *Sebastian.* But one fiend at a time,
> I'll fight their legions o'er.
> *Antonio.* I'll be thy second.[2]

[1] Compare *Tempest:* III. iii. 95.

[2] *Tempest:* III. iii. 102.

The Shakespearean Drama has caught the spiritual mystery: He that is righteous, let him be righteous still; and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still.

There is yet one more phase in this revelation of personal providence. Prospero's purpose extends from judgment to mercy.

> The charm dissolves apace,
> And as the morning steals upon the night,
> Melting the darkness, so their rising senses
> Begin to chase the ignorant fumes that mantle
> Their clearer reason. . . . Their understanding
> Begins to swell, and the approaching tide
> Will shortly fill the reasonable shore
> That now lies foul and muddy.

What ensues gradually unfolds itself as a universal restoration, embracing not only the holy Gonzalo and the remorseful Alonso, but also the hardened Sebastian and Antonio, Caliban the gross, Stephano the drunken; it extends even to the inanimate things of nature — the ship, that at the opening of the play had been seen to burn and sink, reappearing as trim as when she first left her dock.

Is this sound theology? Are its parts even consistent one with the other? There is no question here of theology, there is no question of soundness, there is no question even of consistency. The whole is but the dramatisation of a fancy, the fancy of a human mind and heart elevated for a single day to the position of an overruling providence. All the varied ideas which in the past have impressed thinking minds as they have surveyed the course of the world may here find a place, without sense of conflict or need of reconciliation. Whatever it may be, this speculation on personal providence in *The Tempest* makes the natural close to the task attempted in this book. The dramatic expression of the forces in the moral world of Shakespeare commences with personal will, its busy intrigues, and their ironic clashings. It extends to the various restraints, from within and from without, which limit personal will. It ends with the conception of personality projected to the supreme control of the universe.

APPENDIX

PLOT SCHEMES OF SHAKESPEAREAN DRAMAS

PLOT IN SHAKESPEARE

Dramatic Plot may be defined, from the artistic side, as the concurrence of all that appears in a drama in a unity or harmony of design. Its interest is analogous to that of geometric drawing: a course of events may be appreciated in itself, like the beauty of a curve; or various courses of events may be seen to harmonise, as with the intricacy of intersecting lines in a pattern. From the side of human interest it may be said that plot is in fiction what providence is for the real world; every play is a microcosm, of which the poet is the creator, and its plot the providential scheme. The analysis of such plot is analogous to science, which takes to pieces the world of reality, and shows how these parts combine in a unity of evolution or law.

The founder of literary criticism was Aristotle, and attempts are still made to adapt his system to modern poetry. But Greek drama and Shakespearean drama are at opposite ends of the dramatic scale: the one rests upon utter simplicity, the other upon infinite complexity. Circumstances of its origin made Greek tragedy a literary species by the distinguishing characteristic of the 'three unities': the unity of action limited a play to a single story, the unities of time and place still further limited the presentation of this story to its crisis, all the rest of it being conveyed indirectly. The romantic drama, on the contrary, combines in one play any number of different stories, exhibiting each story (it may be) from beginning to end. Thus beauty in Greek drama resolves itself into this — how much can be kept out: it rests upon indirect suggestion and sculpturesque pose. Beauty in romantic drama seeks, on the contrary, to get in all the matter possible, crowding in fulness of picturesque action, yet all of it within the bounds of harmony. Literature is the richer for containing these contrasted types: but the same plan of analysis will not fit both. In Greek drama plot was so simple that it was indistinguishable from movement of story. In the analysis of Shakespearean drama movement falls into the background; what becomes prominent is the interweaving of different stories, that move side by side like the four parts of musical harmony, with the artistic effects of symmetry, balance, contrast, making themselves felt as these stories progress. The interest is closely akin to that of counterpoint in music.

The Unit of Plot

In romantic drama, naturally, the unit of plot is the romance or story. Thus *The Merchant of Venice* takes three stories from different books of romance, adds to these a fourth story, and interweaves all four into a scheme of plot. [See above, page 168.] The word 'story,' however, connotes the human interest; the corresponding term in art analysis is 'action.' An action is a series of incidents that can be thought of as a separate whole. In *Othello*, we may take various details from successive parts of the play, and mentally put them together as 'the intrigue of Iago to get money out of Roderigo': this is an 'action.' Such 'actions' are the units into which a Shakespearean plot resolves itself; 'stories' are actions which have human interest enough to stand alone (like the Story of the Pound of Flesh), whereas other actions would have interest only as analytic elements of a plot scheme.

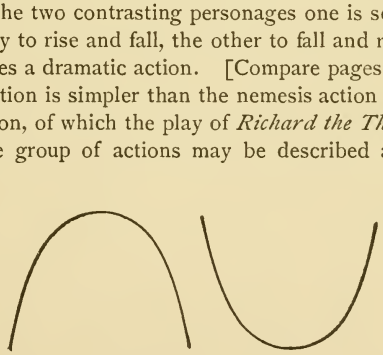
A story, or action, may be simple or 'complicated.' Any sequence of events which, for any purpose, is regarded as a unity, would be a simple action. In other cases a train of events is diverted from its apparent course — this is 'complication': there follows then either 'resolution,' the complication being overcome, or tragic 'determination,' the natural course of events being hopelessly destroyed. [See above, pages 162–3.]

NOTE: *In what follows the reader should refer to the plot scheme of each play as it is mentioned: the references give the pages below on which the schemes will be found.*

The foundation step in plot analysis is the identification of these actions: the perception of what, in regard to the design of the whole, is worth distinguishing as an independent unit. It is easy to see that an action is constituted by an exhibition of jealousy and subsequent reconciliation, as with Antipholus of Ephesus in *Comedy of Errors* (page 339), or the Fairies in *Midsummer-Night's Dream* (page 342); or by a misunderstanding and its explanation, as with Antipholus and his slave Dromio (page 339); or by the peril of Ægeon and his sudden release in the same play; or by the haunting of the Mechanics and their disenchantment in *Midsummer-Night's Dream* (page 342); or by the artificial convention of the King and his suite in *Love's Labour's*

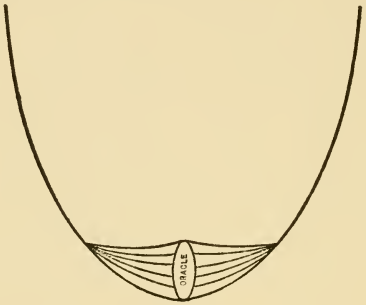
Lost and the reaction under influence of his visitors (page 348). Similarly, love that ends in marriage makes action after action in *As You Like It* and similar plays (pages 340, 349, etc.); an action is made by the tragic love of Suffolk in *II Henry the Sixth*, or by the wooing in broken French and English in *Henry the Fifth* (page 391). The friendship of Proteus and Valentine, interrupted and restored, makes an action (page 341), and so does the friendship of Achilles and Patroclus with its tragic termination (page 362). Not only is an action constituted by folly and its exposure, as with Parolles (page 345), but also by the sustained exhibition of folly, of which three types, making three separate actions, may be seen in *Twelfth Night* (page 340). So the sustained pathos of Cordelia's sufferings in *Lear*, or of Portia in *Julius Cæsar* (pages 354, 357), is sufficient to give individuality to an action; similarly, the comic life portrayed through the two parts of *Henry the Fourth* (page 370) makes a comic action in the plots of those plays. We get a character action, such as that of Coriolanus (page 358). Contrast of character makes a single action when it binds together Achilles and Ajax into a single element of plot (page 362); or it is a point of contrast between two separate actions in *Timon* (page 355), where of the two contrasting personages one is seen in the movement of the play to rise and fall, the other to fall and rise. Obviously, an intrigue makes a dramatic action. [Compare pages 343, 344.]

No type of action is simpler than the nemesis action made by a crime and its retribution, of which the play of *Richard the Third* is full (page 403). A whole group of actions may be described as *arch actions:*



here plot form and geometric form become very close. An arch action may be a rise and fall, as in the case of the conspirators in *Julius Cæsar* (page 357); the passage from the end of success to the beginning of failure occurring at the centre of the drama, as if at the summit of the arch. Or, the arch reversed appears in such a plot as *Winter's Tale*, where there is fall and restoration, the oracle appearing as keystone

(page 350). A field for ingenuity is open in the attempt to represent plot design in geometric figure. This last play, with its central oracle gathering up the sixfold destruction and shadowing the sixfold restoration, would be represented with considerable exactness by a figure like this. [Compare pages 70, 75, 350.]



Sometimes what gives unity to an action is its connection with the movement of the drama. Thus in *Two Gentlemen* (page 341) the successive journeys of the different personages make a complicating action in the whole scheme. Or, the proceedings of Horatio in *Hamlet* (page 364) are a stationary action: they are valuable in shedding light on the rest of the plot, but Horatio himself is not involved in the complications which embrace the rest of the personages.

It need cause no difficulty that an action is sometimes unified by more than one kind of interest, just as, in geometry, a line may be at one and the same time an arch and a wave line. In *Merry Wives*

(page 343) the Ford action is obviously an intrigue; but it is also a character action, the intrigue being a revelation of a peculiar form of jealousy. The Coriolanus action (page 358) is a triple action, of character, nemesis, and pathos. [Compare page 124.]

The dramatic effect of counteraction may be ground for distinguishing separate actions; thus, as soon as the character of Coriolanus (page 358) becomes an independent interest, it becomes worth while to recognise three other interests, because these are working in different ways against the realisation by Coriolanus of his ideals. [Compare cross actions, pages 359, 360, 361.]

Subactions. — These are in the fullest sense actions, but they also stand in the relation of subordination, either to other actions, or to the design of the plot as a whole. In *The Shrew* (page 344) it is clear that the suits of Hortensio, of Gremio, of Lucentio, for the hand of Bianca are separate intrigue actions in the secondary plot. But the suit of Lucentio differs from the rest in the fact that he carries on a twofold wooing: a direct wooing in disguise, and an indirect wooing through his servant Tranio assuming the master's name. This difference alone is sufficient reason for dividing the Lucentio action into two subactions; there is a further reason in the fact that the Tranio subaction comes into conflict with what constitutes the primary plot of the play. [See above, page 219.] Another type of subaction is seen in *Much Ado* (page 346). The serious plot of that drama is made by a villanous intrigue (of Don John) destroyed by the farcical irony of the Watch (who blunder into an important discovery while they are fussing over trifles). Now, the same villany produces another intrigue on a small scale — a misunderstanding between two friends. soon removed (see the references on page 346); and in the general trouble of the main intrigue there is an independent scene of petty irony, where Antonio, lecturing his injured brother on the duty of patience, loses his temper and has to be himself restrained. These two items are in no way essential to the main business, but have their place in the plot as a petty intrigue and a petty irony, reflecting the main intrigue and irony in the way in which, in architecture, the main lines of the building may be reproduced in the details of ornament. Two more subactions of the same kind may be seen in the same artistic plot: it is an irony (Leonato breaking off the hearing just before the secret comes out) that delays the main resolution, and it is an intrigue (an honest intrigue) of the Friar that restores the delayed resolution. [Compare a somewhat similar case on page 360.] — We have generating subactions in *Lear* (page 354), carried on to initiate the main situation, and then merged in other elements of the plot; link subactions, and other terms, which will explain themselves. — In the succession of histories, where there is a

unity stretching beyond single plays, it becomes necessary to indicate germ actions (*e.g.* page 371), to cover matter which has no relation to the plot of the particular play, but is (by necessity of historic date) inserted in that play to prepare for what will be found later.

Circumstances. — An action is essentially a succession of details taken from different parts of the play. But sometimes the place in the design of the plot ordinarily held by an action is taken by a single isolated 'circumstance.' Thus the shipwreck in *Comedy of Errors* (page 339) is an isolated fact of the past; yet it must have a place in the plot, as a 'motive circumstance,' since it is the source of movement for the whole drama, originating the situation out of which the separate actions arise. Similarly, a shipwreck is a motive circumstance for *Twelfth Night*; from this comes Viola, who brings about the complication of the play, and Sebastian, who resolves it. Again, in *Two Gentlemen* (page 341) the accident of Valentine being captured by Outlaws and becoming their captain is the whole resolution of the plot; it presents itself to our minds as a single point in the design upon which the different lines impinge. In *Romeo* (page 360) the accidental circumstance of the masquerade initiates the main complication, the accidental circumstance of the infected house tragically determines the whole (above, pp. 52, 59). Other examples in *Hamlet* (page 364), and *Merchant* (page 347), and *Timon* (page 355).

Compounding of Actions into Plots

In Greek drama the whole plot of a play would be comprehended in a single action. In Shakespearean drama a number of single actions are interwoven into a plot, and such plots may be further compounded into a more complex plot, the various elements of such a scheme exhibiting mutual parallelism or contrast, or other effects of economic harmony. This has been fully illustrated in the discussion of comedy (above, pages 167–176). In the *Comedy of Errors* (page 339), Antipholus of Ephesus and Antipholus of Syracuse are centres of separate dramatic interests; the one passes through a phase of family jealousy to its termination in reconciliation, the other falls in love with Luciana and eventually wins her. These two brothers Antipholus have further misunderstandings with the two Dromios, which are subsequently explained. Here are four distinct interests or actions going on at the same time, which, however, are not separate, but clash together, owing to the open-

ing situation of mistaken identities. Obviously, a time will come when the pairs of twins will meet in the same place, and all the complications will resolve: the four actions will have been interwoven into a comic plot. But, as a fact, how is this brought about? Side by side with these actions another (serious) action has been in view — Ægeon in peril of his life, until a sudden release comes; this release is the meeting with the personages of the comic side, as a result of which the serious action brings about the resolution of the comic entanglement, and the meeting with the persons of the comic entanglement secures the salvation of Ægeon. Thus the comic plot and the single serious action have been interwoven into the main plot of the play. — Or again, in the *Merry Wives* (page 343), we have three separate intrigues (Falstaff against the wives, the wives to punish Falstaff, and Ford to work out his jealous scheme) clashing together into what may be called the primary plot: as a whole it may be described by the term 'corrupt wooing.' Side by side with this we have another clash and disentanglement of three separate intrigues to win Anne Page; each has its separate interest, but they unite in a second plot, which may be described by the term 'natural wooing.' These two plots go on side by side, contrasted in spirit, parallel in their form, each consisting of three clashing intrigues. But the scheme of the play involves still further interweaving, for the primary and secondary plots clash together in the common climax of the masquerade, each producing a reaction upon the other. [See above, pages 174–175.] — To take another instance: the plot of the *Merchant of Venice* may be roughly analysed as four stories interwoven (above, page 168). More fully (see page 347) we see in it a primary plot, that may be described as 'character swayed by accident' and a secondary plot exhibiting 'accident swayed by character.' [See above, pages 315–317.] These two plots, thus contrasting in matter, may, in form, be resolved into elements exactly parallel each to each: a main action, with two underactions reduplicating the main, one seriously, the other comically. There is further interweaving of the two plots, as the complicating and resolving forces of the primary are furnished by the leading personages of the secondary plot (page 168). — The scheme of *Lear* (page 354) is made up of two plots exactly parallel: in each a generating action produces a situation of problem, which finds a triple solution, the problem and the three elements of the solution being the same for each; the two are drawn closer together by minor link actions. In the play of *Troilus* (page 362) we obviously

have two plots very different in spirit: the one is an heroic, the other a love tragedy. The heroic tragedy is a clash of four tragic actions, drawn together into a common ruin; the love plot is a similar clash of two love actions, tragically determined; the heroic and the love plot are seen in their progress to clash together.

Underplots. — Where the whole scheme of a play shows multiple plot, the different plots may appear to stand upon equal footing, as in the primary and secondary plots of the preceding paragraph; or one plot may stand in subordination, either to another plot or to the scheme as a whole. One source of such 'underplot' is the purpose to give plot interest to the servants or dependants of the leading personages: this is the 'dependent underplot.' In *Lear* (page 354) one problem arises in the royal family itself, the other in the family of Gloucester, the King's chamberlain: this last is thus a dependent underplot. [For other examples, see pages 344, 347.] In Shakespeare's dramatic practice the spirit of an underplot may often be found where the term does not appear in the scheme of the play. Thus in such plays as *Much Ado*, *Midsummer-Night*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *As You Like It*, there are personages (like Dogberry and Verges, the Mechanics, Armado, Audrey) who might well be centres of underplots, but as a fact they are taken up into the working of the main plots. Or again, the place of underplot is filled by subactions (*Romeo*, *Macbeth*). — See the schemes of these plays: pages 360, 356.

Enveloping Action. — This plays an important part in the compounding of plots and actions into a whole scheme. The term has been fully explained (above, page 264–8).

Relief. Atmosphere. — The discussion of comedy and tragedy (above, Chapters VIII and IX) has emphasised the importance in Shakespeare of the mixture of tones, serious and lighter. These have a place in a scheme of plot, though they enter into it only indirectly. The essential idea of plot is that it should reduce all the matter of a play to a unity of design. But it will often appear that, when the whole scheme of plots and actions is complete, there still remains some matter unprovided for, and this is found upon examination to be part of the relief element of the play. Thus in *Comedy of Errors* (page 339), over and above the drollery of the Dromios in conflict with their masters, which is one element of the plot scheme, there is further fun on their part, *e.g.* the scene (III. ii, from 80) in which the fat kitchen wench is described. This has no place in the plot, but must be credited

to 'relief.' Similarly in *Twelfth Night* (page 340), apart from all that makes the plot, there is a purpose to bring the Clown successively into contact with all the personages of the drama, with 'relief' effects. Thus a plot scheme ought to indicate the treatment of relief. Often the relief element is wholly immanent in the plot, or merged in particular persons or incidents (pages 347, 349, 360, etc.). At other times it is outside the plot scheme, scattered, without attempt at design, through various parts of the play (pages 339, 345, etc.). In other cases, the relief itself makes an underplot: thus in *Two Gentlemen* (page 341) it makes an atmosphere of itself contrasting with the atmosphere of the rest of the play; in *Merry Wives* (page 343) we have for relief an overplus of caricature personages, with subactions of complication and resolution. Yet again we see cases in which the relief element is suggestive of design, though not amounting to underplot; especially in *Lear* (page 354), where it is concentrated in the central scenes, or *Winter's Tale*, where it distinguishes in spirit the resolution of the plot from its complication (page 350, compare above, pages 71–5).

Conclusion

The leading literary interest in such plot analysis consists in realising how drama can extend the artistic effects of design — parallelism, harmony, contrast — into so unpromising a medium as that of realistic human life. At the same time the harmonies and contrasts are full of moral suggestiveness.

A difficulty is felt by some: did Shakespeare really intend all these effects of design? Nothing of the kind is suggested. A particular poet may happen to be also a man of analytic mind; but, as poet, all that he need be credited with is an exquisite sense of balance and harmony. As the necessities of the story lead him to introduce particular details, the artistic instinct makes him feel these incomplete without other details to balance them. A sculptor does not go to work with a foot rule to measure the limbs he is modelling; yet, when the statue is finished, another man may measure and find interesting ratios between length of arm and girth of waist. A man of musical genius may write excellent music, and yet he may be entirely ignorant of the counterpoint by which others will discover in his composition regular system. In any case, the question how a poet came to produce his work can have no effect on the question of fact — whether the finished work does

or does not exhibit such and such features. That many readers feel a difficulty in realising this is only one among many indications that literary study is as yet imperfectly differentiated from other studies, such as biography; many readers are unable steadily to observe the poetry from the fact of their attention wandering to the personal poet.

Finally, it must be understood that a play can be analysed into very different schemes of plot. It must not be thought that one of these schemes is right and the rest wrong; but the schemes will be better or worse in proportion as — while of course representing correctly the facts of the play — they bring out more or less of what ministers to our sense of design.

THE COMEDY OF ERRORS

A Comedy of Situation

Above, pages 169, 334

Main Plot: From the Motive Circumstance of the Shipwreck

Comic Plot: the Situation of Error developing as

Clash of four Actions	Antipholus of Ephesus: Family Jealousy and Reconciliation
	Antipholus and Dromio of Ephesus: Misunderstanding and Explanation
	Antipholus of Syracuse: Fancy and Marriage
	Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse: Misunderstanding and Explanation

all four drawn by the Error into the maximum of Clashing — disentangled by contact with the Serious Action

Serious Action: Peril and Release of Ægeon: impinging upon Comic Plot, resolving it and resolved by it

Relief: Word fencing of Saucy Servants — scattered

TWELFTH NIGHT

A Comedy of Situation Developing

Above, pages 170–4

Plot

From the Motive Circumstance of the Shipwreck, by the Complicating Personage Viola [disguised as a page]:

Main Plot: Situation of Error — developing into a Clash or Triangular Duel of Fancy

Viola in love with Duke
Duke in love with Olivia
Olivia in love with Viola

Underplot: A Triplet of Folly, graded

Belch and Maria: natural abandon
Aguecheek: imitation abandon
Malvolio: unnatural antagonism to abandon
developing into a Clash of the rest against Malvolio

Clash of the Main and Underplot in the course of development: Intrigue to set Aguecheek against [disguised] Viola

From the Motive Circumstance of the Shipwreck, by the Resolving Personage Sebastian [twin to Viola]:

Main Plot disentangled as a Double Marriage
Viola and Duke
Olivia and Sebastian

Underplot: Resolved with the resolution of the Main Plot

Relief

Professional Folly of the Clown brought successively into contact with all the personages of the plot

THE TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA

A Comedy of Situation developing

Above, pages 222–8

Main Plot: With Atmosphere of the Gay Science [pages 180–4]

Original Situation

Disconnected Triplet	Friendship of Proteus and Valentine Love of Proteus and Julia Thurio's suit to Silvia [in Milan]

First phase of the Complicating Action: Journey of Valentine

Connected Triplet	Friendship of Proteus and Valentine Love of Proteus and Julia Rivalry of Valentine and Thurio for Silvia

Second phase of the Complicating Action: Journey of Proteus

Triple Intrigue	against Love: Proteus false to Julia against Friendship: Proteus false to Valentine in Social Life: Proteus false to Thurio

Third phase of the Complicating Action: Journey of Julia in disguise

Triple Irony	in Love: Proteus wooing Silvia in presence of Julia in Friendship: Silvia drawn unconsciously to Julia by the falseness of Proteus to Valentine in Social Life: Proteus mocking Thurio, with Julia's asides

Resolving Accident: The Outlaws: stopping successive fugitives bring about final clash and Final Situation

Harmonised Triplet	Friendship of Proteus and Valentine Love of Proteus and Julia Love of Valentine and Silvia

Underplot: **Relief** Atmosphere of Abandon. [Saucy servants — farcical word fencing — Dog sentiment parodying sentiment of Gay Science.]

A MIDSUMMER-NIGHT'S DREAM

A Comedy of Situation and Enchantment

Above, pages 229–33

Plot

Enveloping Action: Nuptials of Theseus and Hippolyta

Enveloping Motive Atmosphere: Enchantment of the Wood on Midsummer-Night

Instruments of Enchantment
- Complicating: Cupid's Flower
- Resolving: Dian's Bud

Main Plot: Clash in common Enchantment, and Disentanglement, of

Three Types of Life
1. Fancy: the Lovers. [A triple situation of perversity — complicated into quadruple perversity — further complicated into complete mutual hostility — resolved into harmony as two pairs of lovers.]
2. Fairy Life: Oberon and Titania. [Conjugal quarrel — complicated into distraction of monstrosity—resolved into reconciliation.]
3. Burlesque (unconscious): The Mechanics. [Complicated into distraction of haunting and resolved.]

Relief: immanent in plot

THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR

A Comedy of Intrigue

Above, pages 174, 228

Main Plot

Primary: Corrupt Wooing — a Clash of

Triple Intrigues:
- Character Intrigue: Falstaff against the Wives
- Counter:
  - Intrigue of Character: Ford's Jealousy
  - Intrigue of Nemesis: The Wives against Falstaff

Secondary: Natural Wooing (of Anne Page) — a Clash of

Triple Intrigues:
- Caricature: Slender's Suit [backed by the father — from motives of estate]
- Caricature: Caius's Suit [backed by the mother — from motives of fortune]
- Character: Fenton's Suit [backed by the girl — for true love]

Clash of Primary and Secondary plots in a common climax of

The Masquerade:
- Primary: final nemesis (and reaction)
- Secondary: character vanquishes caricature
- Mutual Reaction: the laugh turned against the persecutors of Falstaff. [Compare V. v. 247.]

Underplot of Relief

Chorus of Caricatures:
- Simple
- Mistress Quickly
- Bardolph, Pistol and Nym
- Sir Hugh Evans
- Host of the Garter Inn

with Subactions:
- Complication: Host's trick on Duellists [II. iii and III. i]
- Resolution: Duellists' trick on Host [IV. iii and v]

THE TAMING OF THE SHREW

A Comedy of Character and Intrigue

Above, pages 212–22

Main Plot

Primary: Paradoxical Wooing — Intrigue of Petruchio to tame the Shrew Katherine

Secondary: Natural Wooing (of Bianca) — a Clash of

Triple Intrigues:

- Suit of Hortensio [neighbour]: rising out of the Primary plot and absorbed into it
- Suit of Gremio [old man]: defeated
- Suit of Lucentio [young stranger]: attained — takes a double form

Subactions:

- (*a*) Wooes for himself in disguise as Cambio
- (*b*) His servant Tranio wooes in his master's name in order to head off rivals

Clash of Primary and Secondary plots through Subaction (*b*)

- Complication: Tranio's false Vincentio encountered by the real Vincentio of the Primary plot
- Resolution: General comic Reconciliation

Dependent **Underplot** of **Relief**: Grumio as the Saucy Servant

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL

A Comedy of Character and Intrigue

Above, pages 236–8

Plot

Serious Plot: Love of Helena for Bertram

Generating Subaction: Helena's healing of the King — which develops:

Cross Intrigues: Intrigue of Bertram to evade marriage relations; Intrigue of Helena to restore marriage relations

Comic Plot: Folly [Heroic Imposture] and Exposure: Parolles: rising out of the Serious Plot and determined by the Enveloping Action

Enveloping Action: Florentine War

Relief: Humour of the Clown — scattered

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

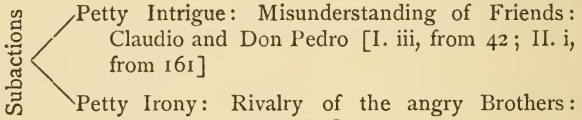
A Comedy of Character and Intrigue

Above, pages 233–6

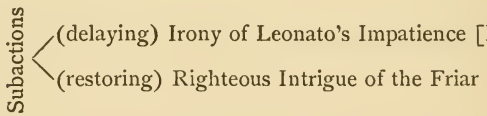
Plot

Serious Plot: Love of Claudio and Hero

Complicating Villany Action: Intrigue of Don John


Subactions
Petty Intrigue: Misunderstanding of Friends: Claudio and Don Pedro [I. iii, from 42; II. i, from 161]
Petty Irony: Rivalry of the angry Brothers: Leonato and Antonio [V. i]

Resolving Farcical Action: Irony of the Watch's discovery



Supplementary Comic Underplot: Paradoxical Intrigue to bring Benedick and Beatrice together

Enveloping Action: Rebellion of Don John

Relief: implicit in the comic and farcical elements of the plot

THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

A Comedy of Character and Accident

Above, pages 315-7

Primary Plot: Character swayed by Accident

Main Nemesis Action: Story of the Pound of Flesh: a supremely noble Christian at the mercy of a supremely base Jew — the positions suddenly reversed

Complicating Accident: The rumoured Shipwrecks
Resolving Accident: The forgotten Statute

Dependent Underactions
A. Reduplicating the Main action: the Jew's daughter forsakes her father for a Christian
AA. Farcical Subaction: the Clown transferred from Jewish to Christian service

Enveloping Action: Mediæval Feud of Jews and Christians

Secondary Plot: Accident swayed by Character

Main Problem Action: The Caskets Story — an apparent crisis of chance really determined by character

Complicating
and Resolving Circumstance: The three Caskets

Dependent Underactions
B. Reduplicating the Main action: Gratiano and Nerissa
BB. Comic Subaction: Ironic Episode of the Betrothal Rings

Clash and **Disentanglement** of Primary and Secondary: the Secondary Plot is the Motive force of the Primary

Complicating Personage: Bassanio
Resolving Personage: Portia

Relief: merged in individual personages of the plot

LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST

A Comedy of Convention and Humour

Above, page 267

Plot

Enveloping Motive Action: the French Embassage

Complicates: by introducing the Humorous Atmosphere
Resolves: the French king's death converts all to serious

Atmosphere of Artificial Convention

A. The King and his Suite
- amongst themselves: the Vow
- as against outsiders: Celibacy

B. Don Armado
- in himself: Euphuism
- in relation to outsiders: Hypocrisy

C. Nathaniel and Holofernes
- in themselves: Pedantry
- for outsiders: Pompous Pageantry

Atmosphere of Natural Humour Complicating and Resolving

AA. The Princess and her Suite: break down
- the Vow
- the Celibacy

BB.
- Moth: foil to the Euphuism of B [as true wit]
- Jaquenetta: attracts B to hypocrisy

CC.
- Dull: foil to the Pedantry of C [as plain sense]
- Costard: breaks down the pompous pageant [V. ii. 678]

Relief: immanent in the plot

AS YOU LIKE IT

A Comedy of Convention and Humour

Above, page 179

Plot

Outer Enveloping Action: Civil War of the Dukes — ends in Religious Conversion

Inner Enveloping Action: Feud in the de Boys family — ends in Dramatic Conversion

Main Plot of Quadruple Loves:

1. Love and Disguise: Rosalind and Orlando
2. Love and Folly: Audrey and Touchstone
3. Conventional Love: Phebe and Silvius
4. Love at first sight: Celia and Oliver

Inner Atmosphere: Play of

Triple Humour:

- Natural: Rosalind
- Professional: Touchstone
- Morbid: Jaques

Outer Atmosphere: Conventional Pastoral Life: The Forest of Arden

Relief: immanent in the plot

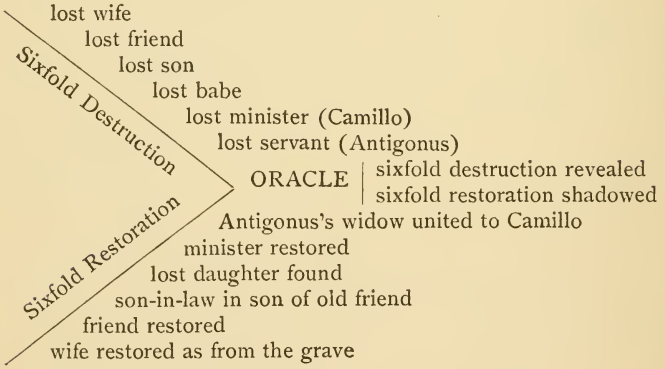
THE WINTER'S TALE

A Comedy of Fall and Restoration

Above, pages 65–76, 332

Plot: An Arch Plot of Fall and Restoration — bound together by Oracular Interest

The Fall: Tragic Tone: Sundering of Sicilia and Bohemia through Jealous Madness of Leontes



The Rise: Pastoral Tone: Reuniting of Sicilia and Bohemia by the Romantic Love of Florizel and Perdita

Underplot of Relief: Atmosphere of Rural Simplicity (flavoured with Roguery) accompanying passage at centre from Complication to Resolution. [Above, pages 71–5.]

CYMBELINE

A Comedy of Fall and Restoration

Plot: An Arch Plot of Tangled Wrong and Harmonious Restoration — with Oracular Interest for emphasis. [Above, pages 76–88.]

The Wrong and Fall

Sixfold scale of Graded Wrong

1. Blind Wrong [Cymbeline *v.* Belarius and Posthumus] — loss of all — restored by victims
2. Perverse Wrong: Retaliation [Belarius *v.* Cymbeline] — banished life — rescues victims in crisis
3. Perverse Wrong: False Honour [Posthumus] — lower crime — remorse — reunion
4. Perverse Wrong: False Candour [Iachimo] — lower crime — shame — reunion
5. Crafty Villany [the Queen] — by irony of death an instrument of restoration
6. Stupid Villany [Cloten] — by irony of death an instrument of restoration

Motive Centre Imogen

by (1) loses husband
by (2) loses brothers
by (3) loses her love
by (4) loses her reputation
by (5) her life threatened
by (6) her honour threatened
honour saved
life saved
reputation cleared
love restored
brothers found
husband recovered

The Restoration and Rise

Sixfold Forces of Restoration

1. Suffering Innocence: Imogen
2. Suffering Fidelity: Pisanio
3. Suffering Guilt: Posthumus and Iachimo
4. Honest Intrigue: Cornelius
5. Nature
6. Overruling Providence. [With Oracle.]

Enveloping Action: British and Roman War

Relief: Atmosphere of Open Air Life in the Restoration

THE TEMPEST

A Comedy of Enchantment and Restoration

Above, pages 322–6

Plot: An Arch Plot of Tangled Wrong and Restoration — resting upon the idea of Enchantment as omnipotence

Enveloping Motive Action: Enchantment of Prospero

Main Plot: The Three 'Men of Sin' [III. iii. 53]

Triple Wrong
- Usurpation of Milan by Antonio
- Feud of Alonso and Prospero
- Conspiracy of Antonio and Sebastian [II. i]

Motive Centre: Common Madness

Restoration
- Conspiracy averted at its crisis
- Alonso and Prospero become kinsmen
- Throne of Milan abandoned

Underplot: linking the two sides of the Main Plot

1. Beings of Enchantment
   - Ariel: upward: assisting Prospero
   - Caliban: downward: resisting Prospero
2. Children: Enchanted Love
   - Miranda
   - Ferdinand
3. Servants: Intoxicated Conspiracy
   - Caliban
   - Stephano and Trinculo
4. Spectators: Miracle
   - Courtiers, led by Gonzalo
   - Sailors, led by Boatswain
5. Background of Nature
   - Tempest
   - Calm

Common Climax of Universal Restoration

Relief: merged in Nos. 3, 4 of Underplot — and in Mask

MEASURE FOR MEASURE

A Problem Comedy

Above, pages 143–57

Plot

Enveloping Motive Action: The Duke

- His withdrawal generates the Problem
- His return assists the Solution

Main Plot: Respectable Life [Angelo etc.]: Law accepted

- Problem Situation
- Triple Clash: Law and Individual; Purity and Passion; Outer and Inner
- Solution: General Harmony of Mercy

- Nemesis Action (assisting the generation of the Problem): Claudio and Juliet
- Character Action (emphasising the Solution): Escalus — Provost

Subactions

- Complicating
  - a. Angelo's Intrigue against Isabella
  - b. Intrigue to hasten Claudio's death
- Resolving
  - aa. Duke's Intrigue to substitute Mariana for Isabella
  - bb. Accidental provision of a substitute for Claudio

Link Action: Loose Life: Lucio

- Complication: Raillery
- Resolution: Irony (of events)

Underplot: Low Life: Vice accepted

- Complication: Hardened Vice
- Resolution: Mercy [Escalus] as
  - another chance
  - discrimination of character between Overdone and Pompey

Relief: merged in Link Action and Underplot

KING LEAR

A Problem Tragedy

Above, pages 141–3

Plot

Main Plot

- Problem Situation: Lear [Passion]: a father reversing moral equilibrium of the family
- Solution
  - Triple Sequence of events
    - Nemesis (double) on the father
    - Sufferings of the Innocent: Cordelia
    - Power used by the evil for their own destruction: Goneril and Regan
  - Generating Subaction: Cordelia's Outburst of temper

Dependent Underplot

- Generating Subaction: Edmund's Plot against Edgar
- Problem Situation: Gloucester [Weakness]: a father reversing moral equilibrium of the family
- Solution
  - Triple Sequence of events
    - Nemesis (double) on the father
    - Sufferings of the Innocent: Edgar
    - Power used by the evil for his own destruction: Edmund

Link Subactions

- Albany: rising
- Cornwall: sinking
- Oswald: Servility and Nemesis
- Kent: Plainness and Pathos

Enveloping Action: War of England and France

Relief: concentrated in centre of the movement [pages 190–1]

Triple Madness
- Real: Lear
- Feigned: Edgar
- Professional: the Fool

with an accompaniment of Nature Passion: The Storm

TIMON OF ATHENS

A Tragedy of Character

Turning upon the Outer and Inner Life

Plot

Main Action

Character Contrast
- Timon (Inner Life): Rise and Fall. [Voluntary Communism — by Enveloping Action determined to tragic ruin.]
- Alcibiades (Outer Life): Fall and Rise. [Injury from Enveloping Action — roused to redress.]

Link Circumstance: Discovery of Gold
- emphasises the Fall of Timon
- assists the Rise of Alcibiades

Link Personage: Flavius
- restrains the communism
- a comforter in ruin

Enveloping Action: Social Corruption of Athens

Underplot of Relief: Misanthropic Humour of Apemantus [with occasional emphasis from the Fool] — in contact with the enveloping corruption and tragic misanthropy

MACBETH

A Tragedy of Character and Nemesis

Above, pages 246–64

Turning upon the Outer and Inner Life

Plot

Main Action

Character Contrast: Macbeth (Outer Life) / Lady Macbeth (Inner Life) — in the form of Rise and Fall

- Subaction to Rise: Banquo [Rival of Inner Life]: Nobility and Pathos
- Subaction to Fall: Macduff [Rival of Outer Life]: Unwisdom (over-caution) with Nemesis and Restoration

Enveloping Action: [Illuminating: see pages 309–10]: Oracular Action [rationalised] of the Witches

Relief: Incident; the Porter: Farcical Wit

JULIUS CÆSAR

A Tragedy of Character and Nemesis

Above, pages 125–8

Turning upon the
- Outer Life: pure Roman ideal of the State
- Inner Life: claims of the Individual

Plot

Main Nemesis Action: The Conspiracy: Rise and Fall

System of Subactions
- Character Contrast: Brutus and Cassius
- Pure Pathos: Brutus and Portia
- Subaction to Rise: Fall of Cæsar
- Subaction to Fall: Rise of Antony

Enveloping Action: Roman Mob and Civil Faction

Relief: Scattered details — in the Mob and Casca

CORIOLANUS

A Tragedy of Character, Nemesis and Pathos

Above, pages 113–25

Turning upon
- Outer Life: Principle: Roman ideal of the State
- Inner Life: Compromise: Claims of Individuality

Main Plot

Cross Actions

Character Action: Coriolanus: Pure Ideal of the State. [Maintained against the first counteraction — yielding to the second in Nemesis — by the third converted to Pathos.]

- First Counteraction: The People and Tribunes: Claims of Individuality. [By compromise of banishment a Nemesis.]
- Second Counteraction: Volumnia: Kinship and Patriotism (*i.e.* local loyalty) modifying Ideal of the State. [By compromise of attempted reconciliation produces Nemesis.]
- Third Counteraction: Aufidius: Personal Rivalry modifying Ideal of the State. [Converts Nemesis to Pathos.]

Enveloping Action: Wars of Romans and Volscians

Underplot of Relief: Menenius: Stationary Character Action treated for 'plainness' (*i.e.* Clown humour)

ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA

A Tragedy of Character, Nemesis and Pathos

Above, pages 128–40

Turning upon
- Outer Life: Public Life (of Antony)
- Inner Life: Private Life (of Antony)

Main Plot

Cross Actions
- Antony and Cæsar: Outer Life
- Antony and Cleopatra: Inner Life

[Corrupted individuality brings to Antony and Cleopatra Nemesis of external ruin — out of this ruin rises Pathos of individual nobility.]

Epic form: Five stages of movement

1. Opening Situation: Public Life neglected for Private
2. Return to Public Life: Rise of Antony
3. Fall of Antony: Public Life infected with spirit of Private Life
4. Pathos of nobility in ruin of Antony
5. Pathos of imitative nobility in ruin of Cleopatra

Enveloping Action: Roman Civil War

Underplot of Relief: Enobarbus: Dependent Action treated for Humour — changing to Pathos with the pathos of the Main Action

ROMEO AND JULIET

A Tragedy of Pathos

Above, pages 46–64

Plot

Cross Actions

- A. Feud of Montagues and Capulets: tragically reconciled
  - aa. Subaction: Feud of Duellist and Humourist (Tybalt and Mercutio): tragically determined — assists counteraction
  - bb. Subaction: Suit of Paris: tragically determined — assists counteraction
- B. Love of Romeo and Juliet: tragically consummated

Motive Accidents
- initiating: The Masquerade
- determining: The Infected House

Motive Personages
- reconciling: Friar Laurence: honest herb wonders
- destroying: The Apothecary: dishonest herb wonders

Enveloping Action (rudimentary): Omens of impending Fate

Relief: merged in minor personages [Mercutio, Nurse, Peter, Musicians]

TITUS ANDRONICUS

A Tragedy of Horror

Plot

Cross Actions

Feud of Andronicus family and Saturninus

- First Counteraction: Feud of Tamora family against Andronicus
- Second Counteraction: Intrigue of Tamora and Aaron
- Third Counteraction: Love of Bassianus and Lavinia

Enveloping Action: Roman and Gothic Wars

Relief: Incident of the Countryman treated for Rustic Wit

TROILUS AND CRESSIDA

A combined Heroic and Love Tragedy

Main Plot (Double): An Heroic Tragedy and a Tragedy of Love drawn together in a common Enveloping Action

Enveloping Action: War of Greeks and Trojans [Emphasised by Oracular Action of Cassandra]

Central Link Circumstance uniting Heroic and Love plots: Calchas's claim of his daughter (III. iii)

Heroic Plot

Clash of Heroic Actions:
1. Friendship of Achilles and Patroclus
2. Intrigue of Achilles and Polyxena (III. iii, from 190)
3. Character Contrast: Proud Achilles and proud Ajax
4. Rivalry of Achilles and Hector

tragically determined. [No. 3 rouses Achilles (III. iii. 225) to the final battle — No. 2 delays him (V. i. 42), until death of Patroclus (No. 1) maddens him to treacherous overthrow of Hector (No. 4).]

Love Plot

Clash of Love Actions:
5. Passion of Troilus for Cressida
6. Intrigue of Cressida and Diomedes

tragically determined in deadly feud of Troilus and Diomedes

Clash of Heroic and Love Plots. [Troilus in deadly feud persuades Hector (V. iii, from 31) to the final battle against the warning of the omens.]

Underplot of **Relief**

Thersites, of the Heroic plot } treated for Clown humour
Pandarus, of the Love plot }

OTHELLO

A Tragedy of Situation developed by Intrigue

Above, pages 238–41

Plot:

Main Action

Original Situation

Trio of Love Actions

1. Bianca's liaison with Cassio
2. Roderigo's pursuit of Desdemona
3. True love of Desdemona and Othello

Motive Intrigues centring in Iago

Four Intrigues

4. Intrigue against Roderigo to draw money
5. Intrigue to gain Cassio's office
6. Intrigue against Cassio's life
7. Intrigue against Othello to make him feel the pangs of Jealousy

by Iago as motive centre all drawn into a unity — with

8. Reaction: all Iago's intrigues recoiling on him in Nemesis

Enveloping Action: The Turkish War

Relief: Episodes of the Clown

HAMLET

A Tragedy of Nemesis, Character and Accident

Above, pages 318–22

Main Plot

System of Six Actions: Graded Wrong with Nemesis and Pathos

1. The King: Greater Crime and (Accident assisting) full Nemesis
2. The Queen: Lesser Crime and (Accident assisting) pathetic Nemesis
3. Polonius: Politic Intermeddling and (Accident assisting) pathetic Nemesis
4. Guildenstern and Rosencrantz: Lesser nature intermeddling and (Accident assisting) Nemesis
5. Ophelia: Simple Love yielding to circumstances and (Accident assisting) pathetic Nemesis
6. Laertes: Simple Duty yielding to circumstances and (Accident assisting) Nemesis

Motive Character Action: Hamlet (resting on Outer and Inner Life): by hesitation enlarging the Wrong — by sudden determination (Accident assisting) consummating the Nemesis and Pathos

Motive Circumstances < initiating movement: the Ghost; assisting consummation: the Pirates

Stationary Character Action: Horatio: illuminating the plot

Enveloping Action: Wars of Norway and Denmark

Underplot of Relief [Pages 191–4]

Successive phases of Passion (involved with the Main)

Supernatural Awe: Ghost Incidents
Hysteric Mockery of Hamlet
Histrionic Passion of the Players
Pathetic Madness of Ophelia
Weird Humour: The Gravediggers

THE HISTORIC SERIES

Ten Plays of English History bound together by a Movement of Historic Alternation

[Above, Chapter XIII]

Prologue Play: King John

Alternation between England with King John and France backing claims of Arthur to the English Crown

Starting point for the Alternation: Evenness of the two sides emphasised by Angiers defying armies of three potentates [*I–II. i. 415*]

The Blanch-Dauphin alliance [II. i, from 416]: pendulum swinging to the English side: England, France and Austria all against Arthur: despair of Constance [II. i. 416–III. i. 134]

A turning-point in the entrance of the Papal Legate: Rome, France and Austria all against England: triumph of Constance [III. i, from 135]

Fortune of War reverses all this: Austria annihilated, France defeated, Arthur taken prisoner, Faulconbridge mulcting Roman property in England: despair and death of Constance [III. ii–III. iv. 111]

Reaction: complete security of the English king encourages designs against Arthur's life — revulsion of people, desertion of English nobles and invasion of England by the French prince [III. iv. 112–end of IV]

Upon submission of the English crown to the Pope Rome is transferred to the other side — Faulconbridge rouses resistance to invasion, French reinforcements lost at sea, treason against English nobles brings them back to their allegiance [V. i–v]

Accident of the Washes shows fortune turning against the English when King John suddenly dies of poison

Alternation between power of the Crown on the one and on the other side foreign war or seditious nobles, culminating in the Wars of the Roses

Starting point in play of Richard the Second: the Divine Right of Kings in supreme emphasis by contrast with frivolity of the King: a turning-point in the awakening of the Return from Ireland [*I–III. i. 62*]

Downfall and deposition of King Richard with rise of the rebellion under Bolingbroke assisted by Northumberland [III. i. 63–IV]

Bolingbroke as King Henry the Fourth, with Northumberland as chief supporter, triumphant over all faction [V]

With the plays of *Henry the Fourth* appears the breach between King Henry and Northumberland, who serves [above, page 281] as link between factious uprisings in England, Scotland, Wales. [Highest point of the rebellion indicated in III. i. of First Part.]

Hesitation of Northumberland [above, page 283] paralyses the union of rebels, and they are defeated piecemeal. [Failure of the rebellion indicated in II. iii of Second Part.]

News of the complete overthrow of the rebellion causes apoplexy and death of King Henry [IV. iv, from 80]

Central stage of rest in the Historic Alternation: the kingly character unites all factions: English, Welsh, Scotch, Irish, all coöperate in the War against France. [*Play of Henry the Fifth.*]

In *I Henry the Sixth* the Historic Alternation recommences, and is traced, first in the war with France, then in sedition by nobles

Succession of English losses: the Dauphin at Orleans elate with hope [I. i–ii. 21]

Battle: the Dauphin in full retreat [I. ii. 22–46]

Sorcery: Accession to the French forces of the Holy Maid [I. ii, from 47]

Surprise: Recovery to the English side of Talbot redeemed from captivity [I. iv. 23–68]

Gun Incident: Salisbury is slain by the French [I. iv, from 69]

Outburst of English rage and Dauphin put to flight [I. v. init. stage-direction]

Sorcery: Advance of the Holy Maid: the English routed and siege of Orleans raised [I. v, vi]

Night Attack: panic of the French, and Orleans taken by the English [II. i–ii. 33]

Stratagem of Duchess of Auvergne to capture Talbot [II. ii. 34–iii. 42]

Counter stratagem of Talbot: Duchess of Auvergne overpowered [II. iii, from 43]

Stratagem of warriors disguised as market people: Rouen taken by the French [III. ii. 1–74]

Rouen retaken the same day by the English, — incident of Bedford's death [III. ii, from 75]

Diplomacy: the English ally Burgundy detached by eloquence of the Holy Maid [III. iii]

Act IV (*of I Henry the Sixth*) *is a parenthesis in the movement of alternation: seditious spirit of English nobles* [*indicated in I. i, iii; II. iv, v; III. i*] *now comes to affect the French war.* [*Above, page 288.*]

The English capture the Holy Maid, and the power of sorcery is overthrown [V. ii; iii. 1–44; iv]

The English capture Margaret of Anjou, whose infatuating beauty brings about surrender of English conquests in France [V. iii, from 45; v]

With *II Henry the Sixth* the movement of Historic Alternation is transferred to the factions of English nobles

The faction of Queen Margaret, supported by Suffolk and Winchester, wins a series of triumphs over the Protector Gloucester, culminating in his murder [I–III. ii. 26]

General revulsion of feeling: the King alienated from his Queen, Winchester dies of remorse, Suffolk banished and slain by pirates [III. ii. 27–IV. i]

Sedition reappears in the popular rising of Jack Cade (secretly prompted by York), which is successful over the royal forces [IV. ii–viii]

Gradually the rebels melt away, Jack Cade is slain by Iden of Kent [IV. viii–x]

Act V (of II Henry the Sixth) is a parenthesis in the movement of alternation: bringing to a climax claims of York that have been rising through two plays [see above, pages 290–2] — by successful resistance at St. Alban's sedition grows into Wars of the Roses

With *III Henry the Sixth* the Historic Alternation is traced wholly in the Wars of the Roses: seen in relief against a background of the unwarlike king [especially II. v and III. i]

York in the ascendant: King Henry compromises by recognising York as his successor [I. i. 1–210]

Revulsion of feeling in favour of Lancaster and the Queen: Victory of Wakefield, assassination of York and Rutland [I. i. 211–II. ii]

Revulsion of feeling in favour of York: Victory of Towton, Clifford slain and King Henry taken prisoner [II. iii to III. i]

Edward of York as King makes a mésalliance: Warwick, Clarence, and French alliance secured for Lancaster — invasion, King Edward taken prisoner [III. ii–IV. iv]

Escape of King Edward by stratagem [IV. v]

King Henry in power, supported by Clarence [IV. vi]

Advance of Edward: King Henry captured and Clarence returns to Yorkists — battles of Barnet and Tewkesbury — capture of Queen, assassination of Prince and King [IV. vi. 77–V]

With the play of *Richard the Third* the Historic Alternation is seen in the House of York divided against itself: double alternation in the whole and the parts. [Above, pages 42–4.]

Main Plot: the Rise and the Fall of Richard

The Rise of Richard is the motive force of an alternating system of Nemesis actions, the victor of one being the victim of the next

The form taken by the Fall of Richard is an alternation of suggestions of hope and despair carried on into the battle itself

Epilogue Play: Henry the Eighth

Alternation in Public life: the Mask
Alternation in Individual life: the History

The Mask

Rise of Ann Bullen: Her meeting with the King

Fall of Katherine: the Divorce Court pageant

Rise of Ann Bullen: Her coronation as Queen

Fall of Katherine seen in Vision as Exaltation of a Saint

Rise of Ann Bullen: Christening of her babe Elizabeth

The History

BUCKINGHAM seen in haughty exaltation

Buckingham exhibited in his humiliation

KATHERINE in a position of dignity and power

Katherine in obscurity

WOLSEY in supreme exaltation and security

Wolsey fallen

CRANMER in disgrace

Cranmer in exaltation

King John

MAIN PLOT

Prologue to the alternating movement of the Historic Series

UNDERPLOT

1. A System of
   Character Subactions | Arthur: Child life as a link between
   { Constance: Passionate Motherhood
   { Hubert: the Man of Mystery
2. Character Development: Faulconbridge

RELIEF: implicit in character of Faulconbridge

Richard the Second

MAIN PLOT

Part of the alternating movement of the Historic Series

UNDERPLOT

Character Contrast < York and Loyalty
                    < Aumerle and Sedition

RELIEF: spectacular

First and Second Parts of Henry the Fourth

MAIN PLOT

Part of the alternating movement of the Historic Series

UNDERPLOT of RELIEF

Comic Action of Prince Henry and the Falstaff lads

Henry the Fifth

MAIN PLOT

Stage of Rest in the alternating movement of the Historic Series:

An ideal Character revealed in five epic stages | The Council
| Heroism *v.* Treason
| Action
| Trouble
| Love

UNDERPLOT

1. Survival of the Comic Action of the Falstaff crew

2. Reconciled factions [English, Welsh, Scotch, Irish] displayed in military coöperation

3. Love making in broken French and English

RELIEF: implicit in Underplot

First Part of Henry the Sixth

MAIN PLOT

Part of the alternating movement of the Historic Series

UNDERPLOT of Germ Actions only

Germ of Sedition [I. i, iii; III. i]

Germ of Wars of Roses [II. iv, v; IV. iv; in IV. merged in French War]

Germ of Love of Margaret and Suffolk [V. iii, from 45]

RELIEF: spectacular — merged in the main plot

Second Part of Henry the Sixth

MAIN PLOT

Part of alternating movement of the Historic Series

UNDERPLOT

Germ Action of Wars of Roses [I. i, from 207; II. ii; III. i. 87 and from 282; V]

Relief Incidents
- Duchess of Gloucester and Sorcery [I. ii, iv; II. i, from 165; II. iii, iv]
- York and Popular Judicial Combat [I. iii. init. and from 180; II. iii, 46]
- Gloucester and Popular Miracle [II. i]

Love of Queen and Suffolk [III. ii, from 289; IV. iv]
Enveloping Oracular Action [I. iv: all fulfilled]

Third Part of Henry the Sixth

MAIN PLOT

Part of alternating movement of the Historic Succession

UNDERPLOT

Germ Action of Character and Ideal Villany

RELIEF: spectacular — merged in the main plot

Richard the Third

MAIN PLOT and UNDERPLOT: part of the alternating movement of the Historic Succession. [Above, page 293]

RELIEF: implicit in character of Richard

Henry the Eighth

MASK PLOT and HISTORIC PLOT: part of the alternating movement of the Historic Succession

RELIEF: spectacular in the Mask

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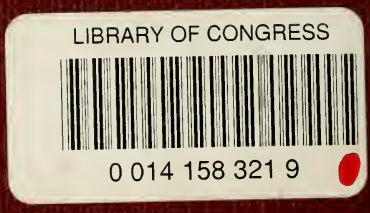
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